

**My memories of Denis Valentine Dowling
of Ranfurly, Central Otago, New Zealand.**

24/6/1910 --- 23/9/1996.

Because Denis lived his early life at Pine Terrace, a sheep farm near Ranfurly, but later moved to England to further his singing career. His achievements in the International Musical Community are not well understood by we, his next generation and our children, and grandchildren. I believe we have sufficient information at hand, in the form of faded newspaper cuttings, individual Operatic Programmes featuring world standard Performers, and interviews given by Denis from time to time.

I have challenged myself to understand this information sufficient to present a readable chronological history of the sheer hard work and tenacity of Denis Dowling, opera singer, stage actor, voice trainer of private students, and finally be appointed the Voice Consultant to the English National Opera Company, formally known as Sadlers Wells Opera Company.

To present a readable text I will concentrate on his life as it unfolded.

Denis was born on the 24 June 1910 at Ranfurly, the Family at that stage living in Ranfurly. Following the purchase of the Christopher's Block in 1910, W. G (Willy) built the red timber house and moved to the farm in 1912. This land was between the Naseby Gimmerburn Road and the Bullock Dray track, adjacent to the land behind the black gate on the other side of Bullock Dray Road, which the Family drew in the land ballot of 'Maniototo Station' in 1892. This new land gave immediate access to the reliable water supply from the creek, which traces back to the West Eweburn Creek and the Eweburn dam.

A huge benefit for Pine Terrace, as this water supply was notable before the Hawkdun Irrigation Scheme commenced in 1929.

In fact, the earliest Water Right on that creek, was assigned by the Naseby Warden's Court to Maniototo Station in 1873, for the purpose of water fed flour grinding, stock and domestic purposes.

This land purchase was interesting. Following the huge snow fall in Naseby during the 1908 winter, when Naseby was cut off from Ranfurly and supplies from the railway for several days, until the men had dug a horse track right out to where the Philip Dowling house is now. So Mr. Christopher could not ride out from town to feed his sheep on his farm.

So, when he did arrive down at the farm in the spring, he was very surprised to see his sheep still walking around. He met W G. on the road and made his pleasure at seeing the flock survival known. W G. replied, well I knew you could not ride out from Naseby every day, so I fed your ewes on my way to feed our sheep. On the side of the road, they agreed that if Mr. Christopher wanted to sell his land, he would first offer it to W G. The land was bought from his Estate in 1910.

As it is recorded in the Family History by Elizabeth O'Connell named "Anthony and Anne " written in 2006, Catherine home schooled Tony and Bill until the age of eight and seven years old respectively. With the addition of Tom and Denis and later Muriel and Stella, an older student from a nearby farming family would stay at Pine Terrace and drive the horse and gig to school, then harness up to drive home. The school was on the north side of Ranfurly, where the Wilson Agricultural Contracting yard is now. All the Ranfurly students had to walk up to school on the rough roads, and in the spring nor -westers. This school was the second Ranfurly school opened in 1887 and existed until the current Public Primary School was opened in 1926, with the Secondary block opened in 1939.

The first school had been built in the school paddock alongside the By – Pass Road, and the eastern Naseby Ranfurly road, and named the Eweburn School opened on June 5th 1879. It was built of sod walls and corrugated iron roof, earthen floor but had good lighting from windows, it was 27 feet by 15 feet in area, with the teacher's accommodation at one end. This room included a cob fireplace and chimney. Two long desks placed facing each other provided the 30 students their desk study space.

In 1879 the By Pass Road was called the Palmerston to Clyde road and led past the school to the famous Eweburn Hotel, a double story sun dried brick building, a large accommodation for waggoners and their horse teams, and where you branched off to ride to Naseby, Ranfurly was not yet on any survey map.

My mother Maimie Dowling [Hanrahan] told us that one morning play time break, a boy ran into Mr Sproule the lone teacher, and reported that a pony was stuck in the muddy water hole while having a drink. The teacher upon examining the drama called all the boys together, picked up a rope walked out and looped the rope around its neck. He then had the boys pull on the rope from the side of the pony, to try and bring up the opposite front foot. Then they ran around the other side of the pond and repeated the effort. Eventually, by pulling up each foot in turn they rescued the stricken pony. I do not remember Mum complaining about the stink of mud among her classmates.

Another day, as the gig was driven through the small creek 60 yards from the house at Pine Terrace, Tony who was sitting behind the cross seat was tossed over the back and landed in the water. So, less than 5 minutes from leaving the house they were back to get a change of clothing. Today, one can only imagine the arduous cold journeys made each day by school children, and how they would crowd around their hot coal range for warmth after arriving home.

Upon arrival home one of the boys would have to remove the gig harness and feed that pony and probably other horses, and of course there would be at least one cow to milk. Dogs to feed and hens the same all before dark. Then following the evening meal would have been lessons and study under the Tilley kerosene lantern or candlelight.

Tony upon leaving school became the first old boy of Ranfurly school to attend Otago University and studied Law, later becoming a Partner in Ross Dowling Marquet and Griffen.

Bill, Tom, and Denis all played rugby at school or beyond, Bill representing the Maniototo Seniors on the wing at 18 years old. That was when County teams were formidable opponents.

Many Family homes were of a musical inclination where playing the piano, and singing were a ready source of entertainment. The Dowling Family at Pine Terrace were no exception, where the piano, violin and brass band instruments were frequently played. And singing as a family or with friends was a great relaxation. Musical events were held annually, both in Ranfurly and Dunedin. Stage shows involving a cast of 30 people would be produced locally, the singing and acting talent being of a high standard. Travelling entertainment Shows would train in Dunedin and then travel to the rural towns. So, there was no lack of incentive to improve your musical talents.

Bill and Denis used to travel to the local dances playing their violins, with Mrs. Reid of Ranfurly as their accompanist. Although there were few cars available, dances were strongly supported by that local community, and if Bill and Denis sung a duet, most would join in. This provided some needed financial funds and was enjoyed by Bill and Denis.

Ron McSkimming told me that at the weekend the big question was, where was Dinny Dowling going to be this week, and everybody who

could get there arrived, because they knew that Dinny was an entertainer, he could sing, play the violin and be the life of the party. The Herlihy Homestead and the McAtamney Homestead were favourites, as they could all sing and entertain.

Both Bill and Denis competed for the Ranfurly Brass Band during the Brass Band Championships in Dunedin in 1925, where they won the D grade section.

About this time Catherine his mother, noted the development of Denis as a singer of potential and when Mr. Fred Touhy, a noted Melbourne singing tutor came to Ranfurly, she enrolled Denis for tuition. So, at age 20 Denis received his first formal musical training in Ranfurly. His tutor also realised that he had a pupil to whom he could instil the art of breathing properly, pronunciation of words, projection of voice to fill a hall, and project that character on stage, so quickly took him to Dunedin to audition for the annual Dunedin singing Competitions for 1930. Denis had only had several months of private tuition from Mr Tuohy but having recognised his potential, had sponsored Denis into this high class and keenly contested event. This would be the first public appearance at a singing competition of Denis Dowling, and his performances improved with that experience.

Obviously, Denis was adaptable, had self-confidence, and made himself at home in any musical situation. As Denis told me in London, he possessed a very good memory for music and words, which allowed him to rely on his voice training, and provide natural flair to represent the mood of that tune. He was obviously a quick learning student, because for this competition he had presented a number of newly rehearsed songs, which showed the versatility of his voice. In truth, his performances through the preliminary rounds where he placed lower than first, improved dramatically to where he placed first in so many sections, and newspaper scribes were searching for superlative language to describe his presentations. Just imagine how proud his mother and family were to read such praise. And it rubbed

off into this rural community, where music and singing or acting was so admired. This competition announced the arrival of 'The Singing Farmer'.

The sections he won, mostly by 1 point showing the high standard of contestants, were very broad in variety and singing competence.

Baritone Solo 16 entries, "The Wraith" 1st 81 points. The winner showed wonderful artistry.

English Song open class, "Yeoman of England" 1st 85 points, The winner had a very fine voice, and gave a spirited rendition of a national song.

National Scottish or Irish song, 1st. 87 points.

Solo from Oratorio, "Why do the Nations" 1st 82 points A very fine performance.

Burns song amateurs, 1st Equal 87 points.

Sacred Solo baritone, "The Blind Ploughman" 1st 81 points.

And to top it off, Denis Dowling won the Begg Challenge Shield for the highest marks in solo singing, and also gained the men's vocal scholarship for the highest aggregate marks in the vocal section. The Begg Shield is the highest distinction available at the annual contests of the Dunedin Competitions Society. The winner also earned the 25 guineas prize.

This was the second occasion on which he had won the Begg Shield.

Note. This Begg Shield was also won by David McAtamney of Ranfurly, at a subsequent Dunedin Competitions.

Denis Dowling

An inspired verse written by a dog fancier during the recent rout
made at the Dunedin competitions by Denis Dowling.

[With apologies to the tune of Father O'Flynn].

At Dunedin we have

A competition Society

To induce budding singers

To gain notoriety

This year there came forward

A well-trained variety

But young Denny Dowling was flower of them all.

Refrain,

So, here's a health to you Denny, avie

Of all the male singers ye sure were the pick

And every sweet girlie

Who lives in Ranfurly

Will be up bright and early

To welcome you home.

In all kinds of numbers

He showed versatility

As well as exceptional vocal ability

He sang sacred or ballad

With equal facility

Did young Denny Dowling, the flower of them all.

Refrain,

So, here's a health to ye Denny me lad

We are all so proud of the wins ye have had

Sure, ye'll be the curly

Headed boy of Ranfurly

With each little girlie

When they get ye back home.

Fred Tuohy his trainer

Is causing anxiety

For the wins of his greyhound

May strain his sobriety

But once let us step

O'er the bounds of propriety

And help good old Fred to get drunk on his fame.

Refrain,

So, hers a health to ye Freddy, me boy

May ye long continue success to enjoy

And may pups thin and burly

And smooth head and curly

Flock to Ranfurly

Your skill to employ.....

Over the next two years Denis competed with success at singing competitions in Christchurch, Invercargill and again in Dunedin in 1933. One excerpt from the Otago Daily Times reads.

Mr Dowling's appearances on Dunedin concert platforms have shown him to be the happy possessor of a temperament which enables him to fill roles of a varied nature, for in addition to fulfilling ordinary concert engagements and taking a prominent part in the Dunedin Operatic Society's production 'Les Cloches de Corneville', Mr Dowling has sung with the Dunedin Choral Society in presentations of 'The Messiah' and other exacting works. Mr Dowling possesses a voice of excellent range and quality, and his training has revealed a decided flair for grand Opera, probably one of the most difficult vehicles of vocal art. The section in which he secured the highest honours was open to amateur and professional singers. All four singers taking part in 'The Messiah' recital had been previous winners of the Begg Shield.

Another Otago Daily Times article reads, Mr Dowling experienced a difficult test for this was his first experience in such a big work as this. But he has confidence and a splendid baritone quality and sang surprisingly well. Mr Dowling is a young artist, but he displayed sound musicianship in his ready grasp of the base music, and impressed the whole audience with the solidarity of his work.

His handling of "Why do the Nations " Was in itself most credible. One innovation brought in here did strike a responsive chord, and that was the Choir taking up this air from Mr. Dowling.

In the production of 'Les Cloches de Corneville' Denis Dowling portrayed the part of "The Marquis" (Henry de Corneville) in a cast of 13 Principals and 80 supporting actors, Ballet group, Gavotte, Female and Male singers, plus a 15 piece Orchestra. It was a three Act production.

In part the Otago Daily Times records,

The time and energy that the members of the Dunedin Operatic and Dramatic Society have put into the preparation of the bright and melodious musical comedy “Les Cloches de Corneville “ , have been amply rewarded by the large audiences which are flocking to his Majesty’s Theatre this week.

There was another good house at last night’s performance, and the audience was enchanted by the dexterous handling of the various roles, the tuneful melodies and choruses, and the extremely effective staging. In its short career the society has made very rapid progress, and a comparison of the first production with ‘Les Cloches de Corneville’ amply bears this out.

And another report. Mr. Denis Dowling introduced himself to the Dunedin public most effectively in the role of the Marquis, and he is to be warmly congratulated on the merit of his theatrical debut. Blessed with a baritone voice of rich, warm quality half his battle was won before he began, and the quiet competency of his stage work simply completed a most attractive characterisation.

Mr Dowling in the role of the Marquis, made another profound impression on last night’s audience, and the quiet but effective manner in which he played his part, coupled with the high standard of his vocal numbers, must raise the hope that his first essay into the realms of musical comedy, will be by no means his last.

In addition to these Operatic and formal engagements, Denis was also available for private recitals, such as the Savoy Tearooms on George Street Dunedin, where he appeared during an afternoon and evening session over at least two years. Main Church Choirs, by invitation, were another source of training and participation.

The advertising blurb for his Savoy appearance read.

Mr Dowling’s appearances in the city are very infrequent, but each is marked by a fresh interest in the progress of this remarkable singer.

Since he first came into the limelight his voice and style have shown marked improvement, and he has become one of Otago's most sought-after vocalists. His reputation has steadily increased, and the confidence shown by the Savoy when it first engaged him has since been proven to have been more than justified. With an impeccable preservation of quality Mr. Dowling has become very facile in interpretation, and the close attention which he has paid to presentation makes him a most versatile singer.

His baritone voice of beautifully mellow and rich quality and his interpretive ability enable him to present a programme of unusual diversity. Whether in a sweetly artistic or the most robust and virile songs, his interpretations are vimful, with sincerity and faithfulness. For next week's recitals he has chosen songs of wide appeal, each number suiting his rare quality of voice.

I believe on numerous occasions Mrs A. J. Dowling [Aunty Kathleen] was his accompanist. On at least one Town Hall Concert Mr. D. Whelan [Aunty Kathleen's Father, and noted Brass Band Conductor, when in the Competitions the Kaikorai Brass Band swept all before it] was the Conductor of the Waverly Boys Home Band. Amazing, all on the same billing.

So, between engagements in Dunedin or with travelling concert parties around rural Otago or Southland, Denis would travel back to the farm on the weekday Central Otago passenger trains.

We need to recall that for a time, Denis worked with Mick Mullen on the Post and Telegraph, as his assistant, digging holes to erect new phone lines, or replacing dry cell batteries within the wall phone cabinets. Jack Hanrahan followed Denis as the assistant for Mick Mullen.

Another snippet I learned on 28/11/22.

When talking with Peter Becker of New Zealand Curling fame, he was able to tell me of the connection between the W.G. Becker Family of

Oturehua, their son Jim Becker who was Father of Peter, and Denis Dowling. The period is the early 1930s. When Denis was visiting or performing in Oturehua, he became close friends with this family as they possessed a piano, and obviously friendly with Jim Becker. Jim enjoyed singing and performing in local productions, he had a harmonious musical voice. One day Denis rung Jim, enquiring what he was doing. Jim replied not too busy, so Denis suggested they travel to Dunedin by train and both attend a radio broadcast Denis was to sing at. Denis was an early adopter of the radio medium, possibly from 1930. They turned up at the studio, 4YA I would think, and during the broadcast Jim and Denis sung a duet for the programme.

In 1973 Jim Becker led a touring party of local Curlers to Scotland, including Bill Dowling and Doug Francis, many of the Curlers Wives were companion travellers. When passing through London, Dad took Jim and Flo Becker to visit Denis and Phyllis at 13 Hillway. They had a great catchup, as Denis had very clear memories of people and places in Central Otago. Just another memory of Denis Dowling.

His life was busy as when home was fully engaged in the daily farm work. He told me about the day he walked back into the farm kitchen and announced to his Father, often referred to as 'The Boss', we need to buy some new rams this year. His Father replied we bought rams last year, they will do. Then Denis broke the news, no I've cut the throats of them all they were past it, so we need new rams. About this time is when they changed the ewe flock from Corriedale, bought from the Mathias Grand View farm, Waipiata, to Romney rams from Whites at Tiger Hill. With the introduction of the Hawkdun Irrigation scheme in 1929, dry land Corriedales did not suit the irrigated country.

Our farming neighbours Jim Cromb, Dick Chapman and Harold Davis all told me, of hearing this wonderful voice as Denis rode around the sheep at Pine Terrace, practising his singing. Clearly on the still air of

a Maniototo day, just the sound of your walking horse, creaking saddle leather and dogs panting, his voice travelled almost for miles. The only background noise of consequence, would be the up train puffing hard, climbing Cromb's hill toward Wedderburn.

Fred Tuohy his tutor moved back to Dunedin, so once again he showed determination and self-discipline to continue training in Ranfurly.

One evening his Sister read out to Denis, an advertisement for the Centenary Melbourne Sun Newspaper "Aria" Competition to be held in October 1934. This was the most prestigious music festival in Australasia held annually, firstly the preliminary competitions were held in the Ballarat Town Hall, and the final 8 Singers would perform in the Melbourne Town Hall, where they would be judged by Madame Florence Austral and Mr Alfred Hill, both at the peak of their professional careers.

Denis sought opinion from his tutor Fred Tuohy and professional performers in Dunedin, so he was encouraged to enter his nomination. He was joined by Miss Alva Myers, Soprano of Kaitangata.

And so was planned the long round of concerts and appearances featuring Otago Artists, performing in Invercargill, Gore, Middlemarch, Ranfurly including a visit to the Waipiata sanatorium for a further concert, Alexandra, Cromwell, Pembroke, and Queenstown. The money raised to cover expenses of travel and accommodation for the 3 weeks of this competition.

Otago Daily Times reports of these concerts was enthusiastic, and these very experienced performers charmed their audiences.

One report from a Dunedin performance with the Dunedin Choral Society reads, Denis Dowling made a profound impression by his magnificent performance of "Israel in Egypt ". With a bass – baritone

voice of rich quality and surprising resonance, and a sound musical sense for time and rhythm, he will undoubtedly fulfil all requirements.

And another, Denis Dowling a young artist who possesses all the attributes necessary for success on the concert platform. He has a baritone voice of resonant quality and good power, and he sings with a thorough insight into the interpretive requirements of his selections. For his first offering last evening he chose the famous Prologue to "I Pagliacci" (Leoncavallo) an exacting and difficult number, which would test the resources of many experienced singers, but the ease and confidence with which he set about his task, and the excellent dramatic expression which he achieved, left no doubt in the minds of his hearers as to his ability. It was an exceedingly creditable performance, and the audience was insistent in its demands for an encore.

Mr. Dowling sang "We sway along the ridges" with graphic expression. Later in the evening he gave a very fine performance of "Onaway Awake" and in response to further demands for encores, sang "The Blind Ploughman" and "King Charles" both of which were received with storms of applause.

There was also the St. Patrick's Day concert in Alexandra, where star performers Miss Jess McMillan and Denis Dowling were described, the best pair of singers that ever stood on the Alexandra stage. Mr. Dowling improves every year, and his performance leaves no doubt but that he is as good as there is to be found in the Dominion at the present time.

There were also two concerts held locally, the first a surprise visit to the Dowling home at 'Pine Terrace' by Members of the Catholic Church Choir, where they had a great night singing around the piano in honour of their famous baritone, and imagine the pride with which his parents received that delegation. The Catholic Church Choir with

his Mother as the Organist is where Denis began his rise to fame. At age 20 he began his tuition under Fred Tuohy, the recent Melbourne based singing tutor now living in Ranfurly. Mr Tuohy trained singing students for 2 years, before he moved to Dunedin and Denis had no local tutor. Denis received a pair of travellers hairbrushes as their gift for his first trip overseas.

The other, was a local concert performed by the Ranfurly Musical Society with a very strong cast, where Denis was presented with a music case as tangible support from his local Community.

And then on-board ship for Melbourne, for the commencement of the Ballarat Eisteddfod of several aspects of stage performance, in early October 1934. The early rounds of the singing, and the final selection of the 8 finalists, was adjudicated by Professor Heinze, a Professor who abhorred slack pronunciation or singing technique.

Though I have not found written reports of their travel, provision had been made by the organisers of the competition, to provide all the training facilities required by professional Artists. pianists, voice trainers and practise at the venues would be the minimum. There were several days between elimination rounds, where each performance was from the Ballarat Town Hall, with seating capacity of 2000 People. Denis steadily moved up the placings as each round was held, and jubilation when he and Alva Myers were included in the final 8 who would sing at the Melbourne Town Hall, in front of 2600 patrons. We know that Denis, though he was invited along with the other finalists to sing at various gatherings, declined to do so as he had suffered a cold. So, he felt fresh for the big occasion.

And then the big day. The date Thursday 11th of October 1934. The Sun Newspaper headline of the next day.

'N.Z Singer wins Sun Centenary Aria Competition'.

'Unique event Charms Large Audience'

'Applause Crashes at Town Hall as Singers vie for Laurels'.

'Night of Musical Delight'.

From an island table set in the heart of the closely packed stalls, Madame Florence Austral and Mr. Alfred Hill, co-adjudicators, last night heard and selected Victoria's Centenary Voice from among eight Singers who contributed to an event unique in Melbourne musical history.

This was the final at the Melbourne Town Hall of the Sun Centenary Opera 'Aria' Contest, in which six young Woman and two Men, selected from the competitions held in Ballarat some weeks ago, sang for the special Centenary prizes, totalling 230 guineas given by the Sun. The first prize was 120 guineas.

Filling the hall even to the choir stalls looking down upon the stage, the audience of 2600 was swept with crashing applause following each of the 16 arias which made up the three hours programme.

The greatest burst of enthusiasm, following long minutes of suspense, came when Mr. Hill announced the result of the contest as follows,

Denis Dowling (N Z)	175 points	1st
Miss Hinemoa Rosieur (East Melbourne)	152 points	2 nd
(N Z singer training in Melbourne).		
Alan Coad (South Australia)	151 points	3 rd .

Denis Dowling, the first New Zealand Singer to win this Competition, an absolute sensation, even though Mr. Hill said he would do Australia proud on the Stage!

I remember well the reported comment from Denis when asked, well what are you going to do now?

‘Well, back to the farm I suppose where we are quite busy, lambing time you know.’

What an understatement!

Cablegrams had been flowing across the Tasman to Dunedin then Ranfurly, of the progress in each round and the improvement in the performance of Denis, but as cablegrams only carried the minimum words to convey a message, detail was minimal. I have not seen the Otago Daily Times headlines of this sensational success, but they would be no less strident than the headlines of the Melbourne Sun Newspaper.

The only note I have found reads

Young Singers Success.

Premier Award at Melbourne Competitions.

Dominion Special Service Dunedin October 12th.

Advice has been received in Dunedin this morning that Mr. Denis Dowling the young Ranfurly baritone, who is participating in the centenary competitions in Melbourne, brought off the principal award of the festival by winning the grand Opera section last evening. The first prize was 130 guineas.

There were 93 entrants in the section, one of whom Miss Alva Myers of Kaitangata, being heard in the Melbourne Town Hall last night. Mr. Dowling scored a highly meritorious win, especially when it is considered that this competition, by its artistic importance and monetary reward would probably attract the best amateur voices in Australia.

Among the musical people of Otago there would have been huge excitement, as so many had seen Denis perform. So, in one mighty

step Denis had been elevated from the “Singing Farmer “, to a potential International Stage Performer. How to achieve that status, in a world slowly recovering from the 1929 worldwide financial slump, when discretionary spending was very tight?

So, Denis returned to a rapturous welcome from fellow performers and the Public. Within Dunedin and probably elsewhere, there was strategic planning as to how this Singer could be sent overseas to further his training and fulfil the ambitions of so many supporters.

It is recorded that the Civic Authorities agreed, the best form of fund raising were the travelling Concert Parties and staged events in Dunedin. Therefore, Denis and other Amateur or Professional Entertainers, travelled by train the major population centres of Otago and Southland. Their ambition, to raise sufficient funding to cover 2 years of tuition, and the fare to England on a Passenger Liner. It was also noted that subscription funding could be provided at named locations. A really ambitious undertaking. Denis Dowling would be the first Ranfurly School Pupil to seek his future “on the International stage “.

And so began the round of Rural performances, while the planning of the logistics for sailing to London were decided.

The first Otago Daily Times report I found reads....

Mr. Denis Dowling

Valedictory Concert in Town Hall

The performing musicians and the concertgoers of the city joined in a spontaneous tribute to Mr. Denis Dowling, the young Ranfurly baritone, in the Town Hall on Saturday evening. Mr. Dowling is unquestionably one of the more exceptional singers produced by the dominion, a distinction endorsed by Alfred Hill and Florence Austral when they placed him at the head of a strong field in the Ballarat

centenary festival last year, and he now proposes to travel to Europe for more intensive training.

Mr. Dowling is a very popular personality, both in professional and private life, and the regard in which he is held was finely indicated by the strength of the representation of the musical people of Dunedin on the stage and in the audience on Saturday night. If good wishes count for anything, Mr Dowling is already on the high road to success.

But whatever the measure of that success, he will clearly be a credit to the dominion. Students of brilliant promise will be no rarity in the cultural centres to which he is to go, but he has one attribute which signals him out in any field, and that is his quite unique quality of voice. It has a particular warmth and resonance which, allied with definite interpretive talents, should open the door to an important career.

As the guest of the evening, Mr. Dowling was very cordially greeted when he appeared to sing his first bracket. In all, he presented six set songs and several encores, and was obviously at the top of form. These songs covered a wide range, from opera to ballad, and had the direct appeal that is always such a refreshing characteristic of his music. The whole programme was worthy of the occasion.

A note on Music in New Zealand by Allegro includes.

The Dunedin Choral Society gave its first 1934 concert in the Town Hall on Tuesday.

Mr. Denis Dowling whose voice is all the more attractive in that it is unaffected and perfectly natural, made a most successful Valentine, and was recalled to repeat the Cavatina from Act 2. The Choir under Mr Alfred Walmsley's capable baton revelled in such choruses as the Waltz Chorus and the Soldiers Chorus. The orchestra with Mr J. A. Wallace as leader also entered the spirit of the opera.

The Dunedin Choral Society produced their Concluding Concert of the Year, with a wide-ranging recital of Christmas Music.

Amid a long descriptive column of music performed and the relevant Artists was this gem.

This occasion marked the first concert appearance in Dunedin of Mr. Denis Dowling since his return from his successful trip to Melbourne. Mr. Dowling who was in excellent voice, sang the two operatic Arias with which he won the Centenary Aria Contest in the Melbourne Town Hall, namely the Prologue from “I Pagliacci” [Leoncavallo] and “Eri Tu” from Verdi’s “The Masked Ball”. In each of his numbers Mr. Dowling displayed great insight into the dramatic and executive requirement of the composition, singing with engaging fluency of expression and impressive depth of interpretive colouring. The pianoforte accompaniments were artistically played by Mr. Martin.

Later in the evening Mr. Dowling sang “It is Enough” from “Elijah” [Mendelssohn] in accomplished style, and also the vigorous “Why do the Nations?” from “The Messiah” but the fact that he was some distance from the accompanist in the organ loft resulted in Mr. Martin experiencing some difficulty in following him.

Then the change of year 1935 and on the road with the travelling Concert programme through the Rural Communities, designed to raise the funds for Denis Dowling’s tuition in London.

Commencing in Invercargill. Last evening in the Civic Theatre the Invercargill Male Choir’s first concert for the 1935 season was given before a very large audience which applauded to the full the attractive fare provided. The three Soloists, Miss Alva Myers of Kaitangata soprano, Mr. Denis Dowling of Ranfurly, baritone, and Mr. David Whisker of Dunedin, flautist, performed excellently and had to respond to repeated encores. Last night’s concert was undoubtedly one of the best yet given by the Choir.

Mr. Dowling who achieved a large measure of success in Australia recently, possess a baritone voice of excellent timbre, and sang with glorious ease and consummate understanding. As a singer he is intensely human, and his genial personality and sincere appreciation of the audience's approval seems to kindle a spark that brings singer and listener instantly en rapport with one another. Mr. Dowling does not indulge in musical snobbery, he will sing anything he is sure a lot of people will like and does his best to get the last ounce of merit out of everything he essays.

Last evening the audience would not let him leave the stage and demanded encore after encore. He sang a selection of songs that ranged from the heights of Verdi and Rossini to the breadth of "King Charles "and " When the Sergeant Majors On Parade ".

Then, Mr Denis Dowling at Gore.

Princess Theatre Packed.

Despite several counter- attractions, the Princess Theatre was filled almost to capacity last evening, when one of the most enjoyable vocal and instrumental concerts which have been presented to a Gore audience captured the hearts of all present. The main attraction was Mr. Denis Dowling, considered in musical circles to be New Zealand's Peter Dawson, and who is shortly leaving this country for study abroad. Last October Mr. Dowling brought fame to himself and the country of his birth by winning the Melbourne Centenary Vocal Scholarship, following which one of the Judges Mr Alfred Hill, himself a New Zealander and a noted composer, described Mr Dowling as the possessor of a "gorgeous voice ". Last evening the big audience had an opportunity of judging for itself the quality of his voice. It was not disappointed, for in addition to his singing Mr. Dowling revealed personality and stage manners as well as a resonant speaking voice.

Although it was his first appearance at Gore, it could well be said that the audience was deeply versed in his career and was anxious for his success. Students of brilliant promise will be no rarity in the Cultural Old-World centres to which he is to go. Mr Dowling completed his seventh concert in eight days and has commitments for appearances all next week. He was accompanied by Mrs A. J. Dowling his sister-in-law whose artistic playing contributed in no small degree to the pleasure of his items.

One of those concerts was held at Ranfurly where a packed Public Hall revelled in the glow of Denis Dowling singing the popular tunes of the day, showing his expanding repertoire and appreciation of presentation. But the biggest cheer followed his duet singing with boy soprano Verdun Herlihy of Patearoa, I understand the rafters fairly danced. And in conclusion Denis sang “Goodbye “from “ White Horse Inn “

Bill McErlane telling me most people were in tears of delight, and good wishes for his future. What a night!

I believe the last of the farewell concerts was in Queenstown, where on a blustery night Denis Dowling and the travelling Artists presented a programme in the Garrison Hall. It was indeed worth enduring afflictions of the vilest night to participate in such a privilege.

The “central “ star of the evening was Mr Denis Dowling the young Central Otago baritone who won the Centenary Aria prize of 130 guineas, and who is being assisted by Dunedin musical societies to visit Europe for tuition from some of the world’s greatest masters of voice production. Nothing that has been written of Mr Dowling has constituted an exaggeration of his marvellous vocal gift. Indeed, the whole has not yet been told. Not only is he possessed of a most remarkable organ, but he has soul, and he has head, which being translated, stands for rich artistry and great interpretive ability. The small amount of tuition he has had makes Mr Dowling’s

achievements all the more surprising. Among a bunch of songs, which included several recalls, Mr Dowling's presentation of one of the Arias "Eri Tu " [Verdi] which won him the Centenary prize was naturally the most interesting. Later, Madam Winnie Fraser the talented soprano and Denis Dowling sang a duet "Still as the Night."

Denis Dowling was interviewed for his impressions of the benefit of the Melbourne Sun Aria Competition for New Zealand singers.

The immense benefit to be gained by a New Zealand artist who succeeded in making the trip to the Ballarat Competitions was stressed by Mr. Denis Dowling the young Ranfurly baritone who was successful in winning the Melbourne Centenary Aria contest recently, while in conversation with an Otago Daily Times reporter. The cream of Australian vocal talent was represented at the competitions. The result of singing in such company, was a broadening of musical appreciation and the foundation of a higher standard of vocal effort.

Commenting on the general standard of the singing at the competitions, Mr. Dowling stated that it was naturally very instrumentally high, but believed our achievements were not far behind, when the population base was considered, as two New Zealand representatives were in the final 8 chosen. The competitions covered a very wide field, vocal, elocutionary, and dancing sections, to gymnastic contests and mouth organ band competitions.

The mouth organ bands were a complete surprise to the visitor for the bands were obviously a definite part of the countries' musical activities. Containing about 25 players including piano, violins and cellos were well organised, and the music they produced was of an exceedingly high standard.

Mr Dowling's most thrilling experience was naturally his appearance in the Melbourne Town Hall, with the other finalists in the Aria Competition. Upon being chosen as a finalist Denis withdrew from all other engagements and enjoyed a much-needed rest, the continued

strain of the competitions having been extremely trying. He had been advertised to sing with Madame Florence Astral and her Husband John Amadio the noted flautist but had to decline. Then he faced the huge audience in the Melbourne Town Hall for the greatest experience of his career.

The similarity between the Melbourne and Dunedin Town Halls made the singer almost perfectly at home at once, and the general atmosphere of excitement and expectancy filling the hall gave him the required inspiration to produce his best.

The extraordinary interest centred round the final of the contest was exemplified by the fact that the audience's enthusiasm did not wane to the slightest degree during the singing of the 18 Arias, the final artist receiving just as wholehearted an ovation as did the first.

The experience gained was of immense value to him, and he was of the opinion that any New Zealand singer who could make arrangements to be present at the Ballarat Competitions, should not hesitate to make the trip. As the benefits to be gained by competing with the best Australian talent were immeasurable.

In an Otago Daily Times interview dated September 2nd 1935, Denis Dowling made reference to the new Wellington Competitions, where an effort had been made to assist with funding further musical training, to reach a higher standard of performance. He noted....

When I pass through Melbourne I will call on the representative of the Melbourne Sun who conducts the aria contest on behalf of that newspaper, and tell him of the good work being done in New Zealand to assist young singers enter these competitions, and prove their worth to the world.

Mr Dowling said that he had made no definite plans for a career after leaving the London Conservatorium, except he would take up that class of work for which he found himself most adapted. If perchance

it proved that no department of singing was to be his life's work, he would return to farming in Otago, the land still having an attraction for him. It was really the people of his home township and of Otago who had given him the opportunity of study abroad. They had made it possible for him to study for at least two years at the Royal College of Music, London.

In an Otago Daily Times interview dated September 2, 1935, he made these comments.

Ruination of many singers.

"The ruination of a big proportion of singers in New Zealand today is that there are too many musicians teaching singing and voice production."

Mr. Dowling said in referring to the opportunities young vocalists have of achieving success. "Voice production is the foundation of singing, then how can musicians who have studied music only and not singing do justice to a voice "?

If a person has the best voice in the world, it is no good to him unless it is properly produced, and this can be done only by study under a teacher of voice production. There are many young artistic singers competing at the Wellington Competitions, I notice, who seem to have this misfortune.

But he did congratulate the Wellington Society for their vigorous support providing classes for the various aspects of stage performance.

He will board the Wanganella on Saturday for Melbourne, en route to the Royal College of Music, London. I believe he had two singing engagements in Melbourne before embarking on the Strathaird for London.

Prior to departure from the Ranfurly Railway Station, we have this wonderful photograph of the whole Family and In Laws, warm

travelling coats and hats for the woman, coats, ties and Sunday dress for the men, and everyone wearing their best hat. What a proud and expectant Family farewelling their son to an unknown but exciting future. Little did anyone know; it would be 10 tortuous years before they would reunite again.

Back Row

Mr WG Dowling, Mr Denis Dowling, Mr WF Dowling (Bill), Mr Tony Dowling, Mr Tom Dowling

Front Row

Miss Muriel Dowling, Mrs Catherine Dowling (Katie), Miss Stella Dowling, Mrs Kathleen Dowling (nee Whelan), Mrs Maimie Dowling (nee Hanrahan)



An interesting private recital was given on Monday afternoon at the Savoy Hotel in Perth, by a young singer from New Zealand, Mr Denis Dowling who was a passenger on the Strathaird for England. Mr

Dowling was the winner of a competition promoted by the “ Sun “ newspaper of Melbourne. The recital on Monday was given for the benefit of Mr and Mrs Michael Cogan and a number of their relatives and friends. Mr Walter Kingsley now singing in Perth under engagement to the Australian Broadcasting Commission was also present and played several of the accompaniments. Mr Kingsley said subsequently that he had known Mr Dowling in Dunedin and had been impressed by his singing, “He has a voice of fine quality and good range” said Mr. Kingsley, “It’s also fairly powerful and will no doubt develop further”. He predicted a successful career for Mr. Dowling.

We do know that the liner Strathaird berthed at Freemantle for bunkering with coal, and while there Denis travelled to Perth and reunited contact with the Cogan Brothers, who had been the Menswear clothing store in Naseby, and family friends of the O’Connell Family, his Mother’s family.

Though the liner would have bunkered elsewhere the next photograph is taken at Gibraltar with Denis and his cabin mates inspecting “The Rock ‘.

Then under Ranfurly notes in the newspaper, “Advice has been received by Mrs Dowling stating that Mr Denis Dowling arrived in London on October 17th after a good trip.”

Mr. Denis Dowling in London.

Important Engagements.

Mr Denis Dowling the young Dunedin baritone who is at present in London furthering his musical studies at the Royal College of Music, is according to advice received in Dunedin this week, beginning to make a name for himself in musical circles in the Old Country.

Mr Dowling was recently placed in the top grade at the College and was personally congratulated on his progress by the Director, Sir Hugh Allan, who in the past six months has chosen him for the leading baritone parts in several Operatic productions staged by pupils of the College. He has also fulfilled solo engagements at several of the leading London and suburban Churches, and on about 30 occasions has been engaged for film studio work.

At the time the letter giving this information was written Mr Dowling had been asked to be one of a quartet to make a vocal recording accompanied by the band of His Majesty's Grenadier Guards and was rehearsing with the Coronation Choir for King George V1, in which he will be one of the New Zealand representatives.

And another newspaper clipping.

Another brilliant musical success, capping his winning baritone solo performance at the London Musical Festival against competition from all over England, has been registered by Mr Denis Dowling, who went overseas last year to further his studies at the Royal College of Music. Mr Dowling sat for an exhibition scholarship, and advice received by his relatives states that he annexed it, entitling him to two years free tuition at the College. An elimination contest was held in conjunction with the London Festival, which is conducted in similar lines to the Dunedin Competitions. Mr. Dowling considers that the awards and prizes of the Dunedin Competitions Society are much more remunerative than those of the festival.

It is believed that the Letter of Introduction from Mr Alfred Walmsley Conductor and established singer from Dunedin to the Royal College of Music Director, had not been signed by the Conductor, so probably lacked the original intention, but Denis sang through the mishap and obtained his training.

Another cutting.

A listener – in on one occasion when Mr Denis Dowling, the New Zealand singer who has enjoyed such success in England, was being broadcast by the B.B.C. was Mr S. Crossley Clitheroe, who for some years was practising the profession of music in Dunedin. Recalling that when judging at the Dunedin Competitions Society's festival one of the most successful and promising young singers was a lad named Dowling from Central Otago. So he addressed a letter to the B.B.C., and was delighted to find that the singer, was the competitor whose performance he had judged in Dunedin so many years before.

In recognition of the benefit he derived from competing in the Dunedin Festivals, Mr. Dowling has sent to the Dunedin Competitions Society a prize of two guineas, to be awarded to the singer from a country district who shows the greatest promise.

And another long article reprinted in New Zealand.

Mr Denis Dowling, Winner of an important vocal Contest.

Sang for the Queen.

Mr Denis Dowling who in a cablegram published yesterday, sang for the Queen at a reception in London for young Empire Students, is well known as a singer in Wellington and other parts of New Zealand and Australia, mostly as a competition winner.

Mr Dowling spent his life on a back blocks farm in the Ranfurly district of Central Otago, till about 8 years ago when Mr F. M. Tuohy started teaching in Ranfurly. He studied under Mr Touhy for two years and a half, and during that time was very successful in competitions in Dunedin and Christchurch, winning two championships at the Dunedin festival and one at the Christchurch festival. He performed with the Dunedin Musical Society and had the part of the Marquis in a production of "Les Cloches de Corneville". When his teacher removed from Ranfurly to Dunedin he was left to his own resources. One day his younger sister noticed a newspaper

paragraph referring to the “Sun” Centenary Aria contest in Victoria. The People of Ranfurly became interested and collected the money for him to make the trip. He won the prize, and his feet were set on the path to a vocal career. The greater part of the following year was occupied in a concert tour of Otago with the object of supplementing the cash prize from the contest, and at the end of August 1935, he departed for London to take a course at the Royal College of Music. On his way to England his voice was broadcast in Australia.

Mr Dowling’s departure from Wellington in 1935 for Australia and England coincided with the Wellington competitions, and he sang at the Town Hall one night during the festival. Special interest was taken in him as the winner of the Victorian vocal contest, which repeated annually since, has become a goal for New Zealand singers, particularly entrants in “The Dominion” Grand Opera Contest at the Wellington competitions, the prize for which is a sum to defray the expenses of competing in Victoria.

Mr Dowling had the distinction of being selected in the choir which sang at the Coronation in 1938.

About 1938 this appeared in an Irish paper

An artist of note in Monday’s programme said Radio Eireann, Irish Radio, was Denis Dowling from New Zealand, although born in New Zealand is descended from Co. Kerry and Co. Limerick Families and spent most of his life on his Father’s sheep farm. He began his singing career in 1934 and made a sensational debut by winning the biggest singing contest ever held in Australia, and now he is furthering his studies at the Royal College of Music, in London.

Well, Denis accomplished much through his studies at the Royal College of Music over those two years. He created records for achievement, and he obtained his A.R.C.M.

He has now left the College and has taken with him three important prizes which are a sure indication of his ability.

Denis Dowling was the first singer in over 40 years to be awarded the Tagore Gold Medal for outstanding achievement by the Director.

The award covered all aspects of music and acting, voice production and stage presentation, elocution and proper pronunciation taught at the College. He had attended every facet of learning to assist his future career. He also was awarded the Arthur Benjamin prize for the best Operatic performance of the year. He also won the Henry Leslie Prize valued at 10 pounds, because he won the Open Competition for singers. It would be hard to improve upon that record.

In addition to his scholarship studies, Mr Dowling was also chairman of the social and sports committee. It was the first committee of its kind to be formed by the College.

He also took the leading role in the end of year opera "Sir John in Love". As Falstaff he was a great success. The Observer said of him "He should develop into a really good artist." And the Daily Telegraph "A singer of whom we shall hear more."

Mr Dowling also sang at a Malcolm Sargent concert. Of this performance the Daily Telegraph said, "His singing has colour, resonance, and style. The voice needs only more roundness and more flexibility. In June he took the part of "Famine" in "Hiawatha" and understudied Mr Harold Williams in the leading role.

Then of course Britain declared War on Germany in September 1939, which meant that all Singing Contracts, were immediately withdrawn. So, Denis had to scramble to find work.

At that time Denis joined the A. R. P., local volunteers whom guided people to bomb shelters, became stretcher bearers, and assisted the general public.

He soon joined the British Army and at some point volunteered for Officer training. This is the famous occasion that on being asked by the WW1 type selection panel, shielded behind the cigar smoke, "and Dowling you are from New Zealand, where were you educated?" Oh Sir, I was educated at Ranfurly College, I have had a rounded education. The big General turned to the others and said, "I did not know, we had one of those, out there ". With that slight embellishment he was accepted for Officer training. [The English version would be Oxford University, where a substantial grant of surrounding land, supported the Students.]

Upon gaining his Commission he was assigned to the 11 Armoured Division which following their landing on D day and being mentioned in dispatches, gallantry and achievement, saw heavy fighting in northern Europe, culminating in the final triumph at Antwerp and the liberation of Belsen Concentration Camp. The last, was a vision that was beyond human suffering.

In the period between Commission and D Day he was a member of the Entertainers, bringing some joy to War exhausted people.

Recitals in the Old Country by Denis Dowling.

Advice has been received from Mr Dowling who is continuing his studies at the Royal College of Music London, that in recent months he has been busily occupied with vocal engagements and is making gratifying progress with his studies. His outstanding collage performance was the rendering the operatic solo "Largo al Factotum " [Rossini] to the accompaniment of the first College Orchestra under the baton of Dr Malcolm Sargent. Other operatic roles recently undertaken by him have been Escamilio in "Carmen ", Figaro in "Marriage of Figaro "and Marcel in "Boheme ". As a result of the above performances Mr Dowling had the distinction of being the only vocalist selected by the B.B.C. for operatic broadcasts, from the talent engaged in these productions.

Otago Baritone, Mr Dowling's success.

Mr Dowling of Ranfurly is steadily gaining fame as a baritone. He has been given the principal part in George Black's "Gangway " at the Palladium featuring Bebe Daniels, Ben Lyon and Tommy Trinder, Dowling is taking Webster Booths part. It is undoubtedly a big step in his career. Mr. Black engaged him immediately after an audition.

Opportunity Knocks, Call at seven hours' notice. April 17th, 1939

A young New Zealand singer practically unknown in London's musical circles, was presented this week with the opportunity about which most ambitious artists dream but can rarely grasp.

Understudy to a well-known singer at Sadlers Wells Mr Denis Dowling of Ranfurly, was called upon at seven hours' notice to sing the most difficult part in "Der Rosenkavalier " a new opera by Richard Strauss, performed in English for the first time.

Mr Redfers Llewelyn playing the baritone role of Faninal, the central figure of the opera, was suddenly taken ill with influenza. At midday Mr Dowling was told that he would have to play the part that night. There was to be no rehearsal that afternoon, as other members of the cast were indisposed and were reserving their energy for the evening performance.

Mr Dowling although he had learned the part thoroughly as understudy, had never been on the stage with any of the cast. He had however been "straight through "the part a fortnight before with an orchestra, but he had only seen the first performance on the stage.

There was a minor case of the jitters among those producing the opera, which is regarded as being extremely difficult, while Faninal's role is one which many actors are said to sidestep with pleasure. It is exceptionally highly pitched for a baritone. One scene in particular is the despair of producers and cast.

First class Performance. The New Zealander, while appreciating these points realised Mr Llewelyn's illness was his first big chance to show what he could do. He practised all afternoon and at night gave a first-class performance so that the opera went through without a hitch.

The others were so confident in their parts that even if I had made a mistake they would not have been upset. They made me confident too and I thoroughly enjoyed myself.

The story briefly is that Faninal, a rich Baron has a daughter whom he wants to marry into royal blood, elderly Baron Ochs being the bridegroom elect. The daughter having a mind of her own however, marries Octavian a young nobleman. The dramatic and difficult scene occurs when Faninal discovers Octavian and Baron Ochs fighting a duel and learns that Octavian is to be his son-in-law. Everyone sings his mind, and the orchestra works overtime.

Mr Dowling hopes he again will have an opportunity of playing the role before the season ends at Sadlers Wells. For the last 3 years he has been studying at the Royal College of Music having been awarded an operatic scholarship. He will leave the Collage at the end of July, and his intention is to take up an operatic career.

Mr Dowling is particularly pleased that he had the opportunity of singing Faninal because he had previously refused the offer of a trip to Portugal with a choir. While the role of understudy was less attractive, he decided that the experience would be better for him. His chance came and the impression he made was distinctly good.

Mr Dowling is now an Associate of the Royal College of Music, and he has taken many parts in the various collage plays and operas. Recently he understudied Harold Williams for Hiawatha in an Albert Hall performance and in December he sang for the Queen when she met Dominion students. He was one of the New Zealanders to sing in the Westminster Abbey Choir during the Coronation Service.

Another piece of interesting information.

While studying at the Royal College of Music under Mr Dawson Freer, then Professor and Examiner at the Royal College of Music, two past pupils of the same Teacher were Mr Alfred Walmsley, the Dunedin Choral Society conductor and a great singer, and Mr Victor Peters, Conductor of the Christchurch Philharmonic Society, and recent adjudicator at the Dunedin competitions.

Mr Dowling was recently selected to lead and conduct community singing given by Queen Mary at her country home for troops. [I believe troops convalescing following War wounds] Queen Mary joined in the singing and later complimented Mr Dowling “You have a splendid voice” she said “ We like it very much”. Denis had been performing at ENSA concerts for the troops awaiting D Day action for several weeks. [Entertainers National Service Association]

This article further says.

Work of Cheer, visiting bomb scarred areas.

Mr. Dowling has spent a good deal of time in the bombed areas and has seen the great war factories at work. “As a result of my travels I can say that the intensity of production in the munitions factories is amazing, and that despite the terrors of civilian bombing ,the spirit of the people is something to marvel at.”

During the last few months, I have travelled through more of England than I ever thought it would be my privilege to see. But alas under circumstances which do not usually fall to the lot of an itinerant concert party. In this period, I have been a member of an ENSA unit dispatched to the bombed cities of Southern England for the purpose of entertaining the denizens of these War scarred Towns, as well as the workers of the great War factories in this area.

ENSA is a national organisation under the direction of the Ministry of War, and comprises theatrical artists, professional musicians, and

singers. All artists notwithstanding any variance in reputation, are on the same footing and are paid 7 pounds a week, from which one has to provide one's own living expenses. Generally, a party comprises a couple of instrumentalists, two singers, humorous and serious, and a humourist or conjuror. The organisation is sub divided into various groups or units which are at the behest of the officials in charge of the organisation. The work of the organisation is widespread throughout Great Britain as well as the Armies overseas.

The first city we were assigned to was Southampton, and were able to gauge at first hand the results of the first of the large scale German air raids. While the damage to civilian property in the port area was extensive, the naval and military targets escaped lightly. Our concerts were generally given in public parks, and of course in the daytime. From there to the Isle of Wight, a beautiful garden island, where we made more than just a passing acquaintance with German bombing planes, but this did not interfere with the acclamation with which the Island dwellers received our humble efforts to amuse them.

Back to the mainland to Portsmouth for one week and then two in Bristol. In these latter town and environs we were mostly occupied in performing to the workers in some of the huge war production factories. Some of the factories are towns in themselves hidden away in country districts and employing up to 4000 men, who live in camps on the factory sites. Each such unit possess its own protection services, A.R.P. Section, fire services, hospitals, and huge canteens. The workers toil 12 hours per day, with half an hour for lunch. It is during the lunch period that we supply the entertainment. We are told it has a great effect upon the men, who are unable to participate in any other form of relaxation. We then dine with some of the staff and are later shown over the factories. Censorship forbids me mentioning interesting details, but I particularly enjoyed the inspection of one of the spitfire factories. Nearly all the factories are

surrounded by bomb craters, but there have been surprisingly few direct hits.

The experience of an air raid whilst at one of these factories is worth retelling. First the air alarm indicates the presence overhead of enemy aircraft. It might be only a couple of raiders, so work goes on as usual, but those assigned to the protection work immediately take up their stations. However, if large numbers of aircraft say 20 to 50 come over the sirens sound. Holes appear in the ground. For a moment the place resembles a huge rabbit warren and thousands of workers scramble underground. When the all clear is sounded loud speakers "biff out " popular marching tunes and the workers troop back to their daily task. The food supplied to the workers at these establishments is first class, and there is no doubt as to the will of the British worker to win the war.

At our next port, Bristol, daily raids were a feature, but the strong resistance of the anti-aircraft fire and the great work of our fighter planes kept the raiders at a great height, and they are put to flight almost as soon as they are sighted. And the bombs dropped are indiscriminately placed and do not reach the targets sought after.

That was a long letter home and it got here; many other boats were sunk.

Then a small news item.

Queens Praise, Australian pianist Miss Eunice Gardener and Denis Dowling perform for the Queen at a reception given by Lady Howard de Walden at Belgrave Square, for young Empire students. The Queen complimented both performers on their choice of music, Denis singing a bracket of Hebridean folk songs.

Then this comment from an informed traveller to England.

Dr Galway met Denis Dowling on a number of occasions and the Otago baritone seemed he said, to be making great strides, although

he was finding along with other singers and musicians, the road to the top a difficult and steep climb. His teachers and Professors at the Royal Collage all spoke very highly of his singing, and said that his talent was certainly outstanding.

Dr Galway heard him in the part of Falstaff in Vaughan William's opera "Sir John in Love ", which was presented at the Royal College, and he was very impressed with his singing. He certainly was building up an excellent reputation for himself, Dr Galway added.

New Zealand Singer, A command Performance, Queen Mary's Birthday. London June 4th, 1942.

A well-known New Zealand singer Mr Denis Dowling [Ranfurly], who won the Tagore Prize at the Royal College of Music, was a member of an E.N.S.A. concert party which gave a command performance before Queen Mary on her 74 birthday. The Duke and Duchess of Gloucester were present. Her Majesty gave a party at Lord Beaufort's home at Badminton, inviting 150 Soldiers, who included many New Zealanders. She asked especially for an E.N.S.A. party to entertain them singing "The floral Dance ". With members of the party, he afterwards met Queen Mary, who shook hands with him and complimented him on his singing.

This is the fourth occasion upon which Mr Dowling has sung before Royalty. He has sung twice to the Queen, and once to Duchess of Kent. He also sung in the Coronation Choir in Westminster Abby four years ago.

Mr Dowling has registered to serve in the English Army, and he expects to be called up shortly to join the Royal Artillery [Anti-Aircraft] . He has recently been touring garrison theatres, and if he is not required immediately for the forces, he will tour Iceland and the Orkneys for E.N.S.A.

Mr Dowling has also recently taken part in several broadcasts including "The Tales of Hoffman ".

This is the New Zealand Free Lance August 4th, 1937.

Progress of Denis Dowling.

I had travelled on the boat to England with Mr Denis Dowling, a singer well known to the Dunedin public, and after a year or so in London I Was more than anxious to hear him sing again. Luckily, he rang me one day and said he was singing in Hyde Park, giving two sets of songs during a programme of band music. His engagement was for a week, and he suggested that we should go along to hear him on the final evening.

As might have been expected of the English climate, it rained early in the evening, and to save ourselves being really drenched we decided to miss the first bracket of numbers and merely go for the last set. Accordingly, we arrived about 9 o'clock. The rain had stopped, and a goodly sized crowd had gathered around the band rotunda on seats available at 3 pence each. We listened to three items by the band and then our New Zealand friend appeared. As ever his stage presence was excellent. Rounds of applause greeted his entry and graciously he acknowledged them. Then he sang. His voice was rich, mellow and clear. He had undoubtedly improved, his months of hard study had rewarded him with better control and fuller tone. The crowd was delighted, and after his first song there were insistent calls of "encore ".

Even after two encores the audience was not satisfied. Denis Dowling had become a great favourite during that week in Hyde Park, and his supporters were loath to let him go on this last night, however it was a "band concert" and the band struck up with its next number almost before the clapping for our singer had died away. We waited during that item, it was a very solemn piece I remember for Denis to join us, and near the end he came down the aisle to the very

back row where we were seated. The crowd was joyous at his reappearance and all sounds of plaintive band music were drowned by vigorous applause on all sides. Some people stood to get a better view and others cried "Bravo ". We were tremendously thrilled. It was great to be a New Zealander at that moment. We were greeted with a quiet "Oh let's get out of this " and so we fled.

Soon we were far away from that atmosphere of hero worship, mixing with the large crowd in Oxford Street and becoming once again insignificant beings though still carrying with us the excitement of the evening. Written by C. H. for the Free Lance.

In a much later interview following 25 years in Opera, Denis did declare that there was a particular female troupe who were also part of E.N.S.A. and also travelling to entertain the troops and the devastated towns folk, who had caught his eye. They were May, Phyllis, and Lulu Clutterbuck of London. While performing for Queen Mary on her 74th birthday, Denis was impressed by this young " classical dancer " who in their combined group, dressed as the male dancer, Phyllis could extend her arm and Lulu would momentarily tumble around that arm. The dances and routines of "The Man from Armentieres " and other slick Broadway type routines, along with those popular songs about home and Family, allowed everyone present to have a warm feeling of support, and forget where they were stationed.

It is not known how often they were billed at the same venue, but they found time together, to be married 1943.

We do know that Denis was a member of several E.N.S.A. tours throughout Great Britain before being called up.

Denis Dowling Acclaimed. A message from our London correspondent.

Praise for Mr Denis Dowling at the beginning of what should be a successful career is given by the "The Times" for his recent performances in "Elijah" at the Leith Concert. The report gave praise in fact said that he was admirable in voice, style, and intelligent treatment of the music. The performance was conducted by Dr Vaughan Williams. There were five choirs comprising 500 voices, and an orchestra of 60.

It can be said at once that Mr Dowling made the most of his opportunity, and his singing of the disillusioned prophet's "It is Enough" could not have been bettered. His voice and especially its upper register, has much of the smoothness usually associated with an Italian training, yet with it a pleasantly dark quality which marks him out as a born "Elijah".

These very qualities detracted a little from his singing of the defiant "Is not his word like a fire", which seems to call for a certain controlled harshness of which Mr Dowling is not yet capable. However he is still a young man, and when his voice finally matures may prove to be the 'Elijah' of our generation. Those comments would have pleased Denis in his desire to have people hear his every word.

In addition to assisting with A.R.P. work as a stretcher bearer, Mr Dowling has taken part in many concerts recently. He has sung on several occasions to the troops, and in many war-scarred towns. He was chosen to sing in the New Zealand matinee at His Majesties Theatre and he hopes to go to France with an E.N.S.A. concert party to entertain the British Expeditionary Force.

We have to remember that about this time 1942, Denis and Phyllis were all still entertaining troops and civilians, wherever the Army sent them. Phyllis's Father a London Transport bus driver drove his familiar route each day. Mummy was at home and Doris worked at Selfridges Department Store.

So, not only were Denis and Phyllis planning a wedding, which in wartime you did not delay, callup was imminent. We do not know where Denis and Phyllis lived following their wedding but probably with Phyllis Parents.

Their Wedding Photo that we have, is taken at their Wedding Breakfast held in a large function room, on the 11/9/43 and there were 38 guests. At the far end of the tables stood Denis and Phyllis, Denis dressed in his British Officers uniform, Phyllis in lovely summer outfit and small black hat at a perky angle. To the right of Denis is Able Seaman Pat Merchant of Dunedin, as Best Man, Denis's Cousin, who spent holidays at Pine Terrace. As well as all of Phyllis Family, were Tom and Mrs Brewster from Scotland where Denis spent his holidays, and great friend of W G Dowling when he lived on neighbouring Inder's block, also behind the Black gate, between 1900 and 1903. Their wedding cake was a two tier, beautifully decorated, standing on a large round silver stand.

But we do know that following discharge from the Army, Denis and Phyllis lived with friends on Holly Lodge Estate, as recorded by Denis in, "The Singing Farmer of Holly Lodge Estate". However, at the time of purchase, probably 1946 – 47 it was a derelict bomb-damaged home, with the front door blown off, and lying half way up the internal stairs.

Denis applied for Compassionate Leave from the British Army of Occupation in Germany in 1945, which was not immediately granted. Upon approval he returned to London by a variety of transports, he spent one night with Phyllis who he not seen for two years, before embarking for New Zealand to see his Mother. Unfortunately, upon the ship tying up in Wellington he spotted Pat Merchant, his cousin from Dunedin on the wharf, who soon informed him that his Mother had died 10 days previous, but the Troop Ship Captain would not break radio silence while crossing from Panama to receive any messages. A huge disappointment to Denis because his Father had died in January.

Denis in British Army uniform had a great break from War, attended Jack and Daphne Hanrahan's wedding, visited Dunedin and relatives, and swallowed straight vix for his throat ailment every day.

Yet following a really risky throat operation by an Army surgeon, and over one year resting his voice, he returned to Sadlers Wells in 1948 and set so many records of performance, achievement, and sheer worldwide acclaim, as to be a local legend.

Denis Dowling had performed in more than 100 roles, 80 of which were presented at Sadlers Wells, also appearing on radio and television, and many Continental Opera Houses. He on several occasions sung the backing music for large musical films.

And he has the distinction of having sung every baritone role in all of Mozart's operas, as well as in the works of other composers up to the modern Czech Operas.

In the last 5 years of his career, he was also vocal consultant for the National Opera Company. Mr Dowling gave his last performance 45 years after his debut for Sadlers Wells Opera Company. I understand he was the longest serving and oldest leading singer, male or female, that has ever sung with any opera company, in the history of opera in Britain. Quoted from a newspaper cutting.

To commemorate 35 years of service to the Sadlers Wells Opera Company in 1974, at the opening night a special presentation was made to him, where Denis received a five-minute standing ovation from the audience. Absolutely amazing.

"On that same night he appeared with John Brecknock, one of the leading tenors in Europe who was a pupil of Denis Dowling, and this was the first occasion in the History of Sadlers, that master and pupil had appeared as Principals, in the same opera."

Another interesting point is that not one leading Principal who appeared in the Opera on that memorable night, was born when Denis first performed for Sadlers Wells.

When Denis and Phyllis arrived in New Zealand for their first combined holiday in 1976, Denis at age 65 was still contracted to the Company as Principal baritone, and voice Consultant. And he still trained chosen singers. In the world of opera, he was everlasting.

On the 4/11/22 Elizabeth O'Connell Family Historian, visited and went through the folder of interesting Denis Dowling information collected by my Sister, Mary Lampen-Smith following her visit to 13 Hillway, Highgate, London during 1955 - 58, when she lived with Denis and Phyllis and worked at Selfridges Department Store with Doris.

Though this information will feel familiar to you, the content offers additional views on the professional career of Denis, and I have decided that it should be reproduced as supportive information, rather than inserted to the narrative where appropriate. Happy reading.

The first is an account of a successful ball held in the Ranfurly Hall, to raise funds for the Denis Dowling Fund in 1935, in preparation for his departure to London. The description reads.

The Hall was tastefully decorated to represent a winter scene, with the effect attained of falling snow was cleverly arranged. An energetic Ladies Committee was responsible for a smart effect in the supper room, which was decorated in spring flowers. A lucky spot waltz was won by Miss Cromb and Mr J. Cromb, and a Monty Carlo fox trot was won by Mr and Mrs Fraser. The duties of M.C. were

carried out by Mr R. Hanrahan and Mr F. Pringle and general arrangements were in the capable hands of Rev. Father Hally.

The reporter then goes on to name and describe in detail their ball gowns worn that night by 108 Ladies, which indicate a very lively ball and farewell to Denis. You can imagine the excitement within our community.

Life in an Opera House, by Denis Dowling. 1958.

Opera was once described by Dr Johnson as an “exotic and irrational entertainment “. No doubt the operatic performances of his day were rather exotic, for the singers then, behaved in an outrageously conceited manner and wore no relation to the remainder of the cast, or even to the plot of the opera. The operas themselves, might also have appeared to be highly irrational, for at that time, the male sopranos strutted elegantly down to the footlights and warbled divinely in the roles of Hercules, Venus or Julius Caesar with no thought of anything else but themselves. [They had one redeeming feature, however, they could really sing].

Even nowadays, the average man in the street automatically imagines an opera singer to be a glamorous and highly temperamental prima donna in furs and diamonds, or a fat and fabulous rich tenor with an astrakhan collar and a mortal terror of draughts. Most opera singers of today are neither rich or exotic, nor are they excessively temperamental or irrational – they cannot afford to be. They are simply hard working ladies and gentlemen whose particular job in life happens to be singing, and to be a singer means many years of hard work and application before being allowed to sing one note in public. After that there are many more

years of unceasing struggle, study, and self-criticism to follow, if the artist is to keep his place before the public.

Being an opera singer is a doubly difficult task, for singing is only one part of the job. It is also necessary to study the arts of acting and stage deportment and to learn all there is to know about the technicalities of theatrical makeup, an art in itself. It goes without saying that the singer must be able to read music fluently and in addition, the ability to sing correctly, in three or four languages, is an absolute necessity to an artist who aspires to an international career.

All this, in addition to the supremely difficult art of singing, which in itself is a lifetime study.

An opera singer's day sometimes begins with a rehearsal at ten in the morning and finishes at a little before midnight, when the final curtain falls at a performance in the theatre.

Perhaps you would like to know a little about how an opera singer goes about studying a new and important role? He generally starts learning his part under the strict guidance and eagle eye of a gentleman on the Opera House Staff, called a repetiteur, or a coach. These repetiteurs are perhaps an odd race of musicians, for whereas they often cannot sing a single respectable note themselves [in fact they make the most hideous noises when they attempt to do so] they have the knack of being able to make other people sing. Their task is to see that the artist sings correctly, in time and in tune, and to suggest such suitable expression and interpretation as the particular style of music demands. This may be a weary task, for singers are occasionally not as intelligent as they might be and they have to have their music drummed into them, by those often not too patient gentlemen.

In learning a new role, a singer must pay a great deal of attention to style of performance. Operas in the classical or symphonic style by Mozart for example, with their spacious arias, intricate ensembles, and helter-skelter recitatives, require a somewhat different approach from the broader effects which are needed for the monumental music dramas of Wagner or the passionate romanticism of Puccini. Not every singer is equally at home in all these contrasting styles, but it is his job to adjust his performance to the particular period of the opera of the moment, if he does not do so, he cannot hope to be successful.

After he has sung the new part “into his voice “[as singers describe this process of learning a role] he begins to memorise his music and meets the other members of the cast to join them in duets, trios and quartets and in ensembles with the chorus and orchestra, under the leadership of the conductor who is responsible for the cohesion of all the musical elements of the performance to be.

At this point, the artist generally meets the producer, who explains to him how he is to act his new part. He is told where to stand to sing his opening aria, exactly how he is to fight the duel in the first act, or where and when he is to die of poison in the last act to the accompaniment of some particular phrase or chord in the orchestra. All these details must be worked out very carefully beforehand and they are of the utmost importance in securing the final effect of each scene from a dramatic point of view.

The strange thing about this part of the business is, in learning to act the part, the artist practically invariably forgets how to sing the music he thought he knew so well, all this to the agitation of the conductor, who generally expresses his feelings in no uncertain manner. However, after a series of wearing and concentrated rehearsals, the acting and the music join up together in time for the final dress rehearsal, a day which is often approached with the greatest apprehension.

A full-dress rehearsal is frequently a trying time for all concerned, a time when many people wish they were having a holiday in Bournemouth instead of rehearsing an opera, especially if the weather is fine! Anything may and does go wrong, the most impossible things happen to the lights, to the scenery, half of which may still be missing, and the properties – no sword on hand in the first act with which to fight the duel, and no poison in the last act, with which to die a villain's death.

However, all these details are eventually rectified in time for the first night, when the Spirit of the Theatre watches carefully over everybody and a good time is had by artists and audience alike. [It is an interesting fact, that the Spirit of the Theatre often takes a night off on the second night of a run!]

But it is at the end of a successful first night that a singer gets his ultimate reward for all his hard work. He forgets the struggles and the heartbreaks, the back breaking rehearsals and the disappointments, the irritable producers and the agitated conductors and all the thousand and one trials and troubles that have gone before, and he is comforted and refreshed by the generous applause and considered appreciation of the public and critics for a task well done.

It is on happy occasions such as these, that an opera singer feels his job is really worthwhile.

In the same issue of Cresendo magazine I found this description of the origin and development of opera over the centuries. I quote....

The first of these short operas was Pergolesi's *La Serva Padrona* written in 1733.

Very soon they became so popular that people began to do without opera series all together, and the whole evening was devoted to full

length opera buffa. The most famous of all is *The Barber of Seville*, which Rossini wrote in 1816. Both in plot and music The Barber sums up everything that opera buffa stands for. In England we go to the opera in much too solemn a manner. When Rossini wrote an opera (he could polish one off in 2 – 3 weeks if needed). It wasn't at all in the spirit of Beethoven writing a symphony. Rossini just wanted to entertain, and his comic operas were intended in exactly the same spirit as a light musical comedy is today. And just as in Ben Travers farces written for Ralph Lynn and Robertson Hare, all the same old characters and same old jokes come up again and again, so they do in Opera Buffa.

The Barber of Seville is of course Figaro – who appears in Mozart's opera. He is a sort of smart Alec who outwits everyone in a very Neapolitan fashion and whose craftiness and good humour set off the whole plot. He helps Count Almaviva to court a flighty young piece called Rosina. But Rosina is in the care of the pompous old Dr Bartolo who secretly wants to marry her. The plot is not worth describing here. The important thing is that in one form or another these characters turn up in all Italian comic operas. Take Donizetti's *Don Pasquale*, for instance written 27 years later than The Barber of Seville.

Here again a pompous mean old man interferes with the course of young love, marries (or thinks he marries) a pretty girl and bitterly regrets it. Finally, when he is desperate to get rid of the little minx, he discovers that the marriage was a put-up job, fixed by Dr Malatesta [who is here the Figaro character]. He is delighted to give his permission [that he began by refusing] for the marriage so as to be rid of his shrewish wife. Once again there is a sharp-witted young girl, a pompous old ass who comes to grief, a romantic young tenor and a crafty figure who pulls the strings. Just as in a Robertson Hare play or film, part of the fun is that you know what will happen to

him, so in opera buffa, part of the fun lies in knowing what will happen to stuffed shirts like Dr Bartolo and Don Pasquale.

I included these descriptive passages of characters that have to be faithfully performed, because Denis played both characters probably dozens of times, and won worldly acclaim for his performances.

Another interesting snippet of information is contained in the programme for the opera “ Die Fledermaus “ in which Denis portrays the character of Dr Falke.

Die Fledermaus is being presented with two casts of equal status, and the artists in these casts will interchange during the course of the season. This is done both to give the public the opportunity of seeing two casts drawn from Sadlers Wells Opera Company, and because many of the roles should not be undertaken by one singer seven times in one week.

And it was noted in the advertising booklet put out by the Sadlers Wells Opera Company promoting this opera, that Denis had been a leading baritone, particularly famed for the “ Barber “ in both “ The Barber of Seville “ and “The Marriage of Figaro “.

Three different opinion pieces written by Opera Critics of the performance of Denis playing Dr Malatesta, on possibly the same night.

Denis Dowling looking like a scheming masher in a Victorian melodrama, is an ideal Malatesta who always contains his liveliness within a line of elegant movement, and Marion Studholme, as the capricious Norina, is in excellent voice.

These singers rightly present Malatesta and Norina as real characters, whereas Eric Shilling, rather untidy in his movements and singing in a heavy nasal tone, sees nothing in Pasquale but a figure of conventional farce. Within its limits his performance is adequate, but

Mr Dowling and Miss Studholme show that these limits are too narrow.

The second.

Eric Shilling had a full, round, unfaltering tone as Pasquale, and brought out the comedy well enough in a conventional way, though without the mature amiable senescence. Denis Dowling repeated his stylish performance as an agile kind of confidence trickster Malatesta, with a touch of the smooth Victorian villain about him. This was agreeable semi burlesque, sung fluently. The patter duet of course, was unfailing, though this was the one occasion when not a word could be distinguished, not that any ever can. Marion Studholme brought her sweet, easy, bell like notes and pert gaiety to the role of Norina.

The third.

We were swept on irresistibly by the gay tide of Don Pasquale at Sadlers Wells last night. Donizetti's exuberant comedy was performed with a continuous gusto founded on the accomplishment of the whole cast.

What a happy presentation this is, in its spontaneity and high spirits, and in its vocal quality and wit. Marion Studholme that superb soprano from whose lips the sparking coloratura came so lithely charmed our eyes and our ears.

The opera whirls in an atmosphere of extravagant nonsense and the Studholme Norina's man breaking [of the Don] was exquisitely in its mood. What a lissom voice this is, how true its technique, and how light and discerning a stage touch goes with it.

Eric Shilling appearing in the role for the first time, made the belatedly romantic Don live enormously before us, in hope and affliction.

Denis Dowling's Doctor Malatesta had the poise and distinction of manner which customarily mark the work of this fine singing actor. Part of the famous patter duet with Don Pasquale had to be repeated in front of the curtain.

Each, to their own point of view.

Merry England.

The admirable new production of Edward German's lusty and melodious operetta Merry England at Sadlers Wells last night produced a straight dilemma. Whether to concede the highest points to Anna Pollack or to Denis Dowling.

Anna was an ageing Good Queen Bess. The way she strutted ashore at Windsor on May Day, and called for a tankard of ale, conveyed personality and character from the start.

The Royal part was given vigour and decision right through to the Morris dancing, revels in which the gorgeously attired Queen staggered up from her chair and joined in a jig.

Dowling on the other hand had the more comic character of Wilkins, a London actor giving the Windsor locals a treat. He lorded it over them with a supremely confident air. He might have been Shakespeare himself before the Queen.

His appearance as St George on a wonderful hobby horse with flashing diamond eyes produced a tornado of laughter as he vanquished a two-man scarlet dragon.

The tunes we know so well seemed better still and at times thrilling when the Wells Opera sang them. The Producer was Dennis Arundell, and Conductor James Robertson.

And another Opera buffs report of Merry England.

It requires good voices capable of nimble ensemble, and for the most part it receives them in Dennis Arundell's speedy, workmanlike, though occasionally trying too hard production.

The best part is the comedy, in which Denis Dowling as the actor Wilkins, and his company of rude mechanicals, who might have dropped in from "A Midsummer Night's Dream" enjoy themselves in histrionic posturing's, protestations and puns.

Mr Dowling is one of the best baritones in the Wells Company, and he here shows himself to be a considerable comedian as well, with an admirably varied speaking voice.

And another.

Denis Dowling pulled of a hit with "King Neptune Sat" the epitome of all police concert baritone action songs.

And another.

That experienced actor singer Denis Dowling grabbed the comic possibilities of Walter Wilkins, the London actor with both hands. His patter songs went splendidly and naïve though the fun is, he pushed it along with the gusto it demanded." Naïve " is indeed the word for the jokes. But the laughs came good and loud from an audience which was thoroughly enjoying itself, even if sometimes feeling a little incredulous at what it was hearing.

Another Opera Cinderella and the reviews.

Rossini's "Cinderella" was an immediate success in its sparkling production at Sadlers Wells a year ago, and it returned last night with undiminished high spirits.

The second of these virtues is the more important, for it is one thing to mount a successful production, quite another to hold it. Only a Company in good operatic health can be relied upon to sustain a performance in repertory with the pace and enthusiasm of this one.

The newcomer to the cast slipped in with barely a jolt, though this was Ian Wallace's Sadlers Wells debut, his Don Magnifico has already been an ornament to Glyndebourne's production.

As before, Patricia Kern was a touching Cinderella. She scales the wide ranging coloratura with a confidence that does not contradict the appealing shyness of her performance.

Denis Dowling's Dandini is as brilliant a comedy firework as ever, and comes usefully to the rescue in the slow opening stages of the opera.

Another writer says.

An outstanding characterisation is Denis Dowling's Dandini, full of brilliantly caricatured foppish conceit and sung with style and fluency in the florid difficulties. Patricia Kern who has considerably developed her powers, makes an appealing Cinderella, and the rest of the cast balance well.

And yet another writer says.

Denis Dowling is an artist with a fine comic gift, always measured inside that tricky boundary line that separates a comic performance from burlesque and overstatement.

Sparkling Revival of La Cenerentola.

It is almost a year since Sadlers Wells introduced Rossini's La Cenerentola into its repertory, and since then we are told the success of the venture has enabled it to travel to 16 provincial cities and still farther afield to the Brussels International Festival. Last night's revival on home ground the first of the new season, found the piece as scintillating as ever, a triumph for this Company from the point of view of music, production and décor.

Mr Denis Dowling repeated his irresistibly comic Dandini without ever putting a foot too far, at first some of Rossini's vocal gymnastics

seemed to tax him, but his voice gained in fluency as the evening progressed.

Sadlers Wells Mozart's "Marriage of Figaro ". The revival of this comedy.

Major credit must go to Edward Dent's translation, which can hardly fail in the heightened comedy of such moments as Figaro's discovery of his parents.

What was clear on Tuesday was the key part played by Denis Dowling as Figaro in the total dramatic success. In this opera as in "Don Giovanni " one can sometimes come away wondering why the main character should be regarded as the principal part.

Mr Dowling played the part with a conviction that made all its contradictions seem a necessary part of a very real whole. Even his Harpo Marx face sat wonderfully well in many of the comic situations, but he never subordinated the musical interest to the comedy, for unlike so many baritones, his voice is well focused in definition of pitch.

Another Opera evening saw a double billing, "The Nightingale " and " Oedipus ", written by Stravinsky.

In Oedipus Denis Dowling assumed the very awkward job of the "Recitant "with as is usual for him, great competence.

The second writer stated – Oedipus has a new Narrator, Mr Denis Dowling, who does not avoid the comic implications of his conceivably redundant text.

This interview by the Otago Daily Times correspondent Trevor Rowe was recorded in London during 1964, and widely syndicated in New Zealand.

Memorable St. Patrick's Day

25 Years as Opera Star for Ranfurly Farm Boy. London 17/3/64.

Twenty-five years ago today, a memorable St Patrick's Day indeed, a young New Zealand baritone, Denis Dowling from Ranfurly in Otago, made his opera debut at Sadlers Wells as Von Faninal in Der Rosenkavalier.

Now, 70 roles later this distinguished singer who has won acclaim in many of Europe's capitals as well as in the United Kingdom, is still a principal baritone with the Sadlers Wells Company and one of the outstanding names still in opera.

The years have exhausted neither himself nor his quite astonishing repertoire, though it is perhaps a concession to age that he is evincing today an increasing interest in the more mature roles.

Yet such is his genius as an actor, something which the critics here have long recognised, and splendid still his voice, that he can take in his stride the youthful parts in which for so long he has excelled.

As we chatted today Denis Dowling looked back on 25 years of accomplishment, a period interrupted by service in Northern Europe with the British Army's 11th Armoured Division and subsequent compassionate leave in New Zealand in 1945-46, with an interesting blend of humility, gratitude, and personal pleasure.

Disappointments? Thousands of them.

And compensations? A million or more.

Were it not for the heartaches as well as the moments of triumph, he doubts that opera would have anything like its almost undeniable fascination.

The secret of his enduring skill? Perhaps a chance remark he made offers the clue to this.

"I am never bored on stage " he said " It is the very foundation of stage work, I think, that every performance must be looked upon as a FIRST performance. If it is not, then as an artist you die.

Experience and ability combine to make Denis Dowling a person to whom opera singers in embryo turn as though by instinct, for advice and guidance. He has ever been ready to extend a helping hand.

His rules of conduct and procedure are rigid, born as they are of a quarter of a century's knowledge of theatre and its pitfalls. He has seen so many, in some instances singers of enormous potential, fall by the wayside and leave opera never to return.

His love of theatre and of the operatic arts is such that slackness and inefficiency anger him. Arrogance he identifies with the inept, increasing arrogance with the increasingly inept.

For young New Zealanders contemplating a career in opera abroad he would in general terms emphasise three points.

- 1 the necessity for a good musical background
- 2 the capacity to learn one's work thoroughly
- 3 realise that it is wise not to be too ambitious in the early stages of one's career.

The attractions of this career should never be allowed to disguise the fact that it is a most exacting one.

In Britain he added, the operatic field was especially competitive. There was always someone ready to step into the shoes of the person who faltered. There were no shortcuts. It took years to be able to portray all the subtleties of a character.

Self-discipline is as essential as the first basic requirement – a first class voice. Humility too is important, for by being humble one may learn and also profit from one's errors.

Yes, success in opera demands a life of rigid discipline. As opportunity offers one must get rest, and a singer must gear himself, or herself, to meet disappointment.

I personally would urge young singers to restrict themselves to roles within their capabilities and experience. So many have failed through excessive ambition, even through being forced by others, by those in fact, who have forgotten that even the greatest voice is a sensitive instrument.

“Never despise the critics, and never ignore an unfavourable criticism.”

They may not find their way into your album, nobody likes to put a bad criticism there, but remember, that critic may be right, and certainly something in your performance has irritated him. It could offend others also. Be wise. Profit from it. I’m not ashamed to admit that I have.

Down through the years as newspaper comment proves, the critics have recognised in Dowling one of the leading singers cum actors of his time in London, and some have even urged students to study his work, especially his work in comedy.

Comedy in opera is very, very difficult. It demands the highest standards of teamwork, timing and restraint. It is so easy to make the audience laugh at the wrong time.

If he has a particular operatic flair, then it is in his interpretation of the Mozart operas. It was not surprising therefore, that he should name this composer as his favourite.

One must hand that to Mozart, he has been my best friend. But, Puccini’s “Gianni Schicchi” is a gem, and there are many others. For example, as Dandini in Rossini’s “La Cenerentola” at the International Festival in Brussels three years ago Dowling scored a tremendous personal triumph.

His “Earl of Mountararat” in “Iolanthe” at Sadlers Wells two years ago in the first professional production of a Gilbert and Sullivan work

outside the D'oyly Carte organisation emphasised his gifts in the operatic field.

In seven tours embracing the Continent and Scandinavia he has found audiences rather more demonstrative than in Britain especially in the matter of curtain calls. It is nothing to wait 15 minutes, I remember once with "Peter Grimes " the curtain calls took 17 minutes.

A source of particular gratification to Mr Dowling has been his presentation of the two subtly different Figaro roles, that of the cheerful fellow of Rossini's "Barber of Seville " and of the somewhat bitter suspicious man in Mozart's " Marriage of Figaro ".

These he plays to perfection. The contrast is distinctive.

In the immediate future he will be singing the roles of Dr Malatesta in "Don Pasquale ", a Donizetti role which he "made his own" at Sadlers Wells and which inspired a leading critic to remark that he was "beating the Italians at their own job ".

And Don Alfonso in "Cosi Fan Tutte " in the north of England and in Scotland. In May he will be at Sadlers Wells in "Iolanthe", which is to be televised. Then there will be a holiday in Spain with his Wife, an English girl who formally trained in ballet.

Often, he has been asked by friends and musicians in New Zealand why he has not performed opera there. Nothing would give him greater pleasure, but the simple answer is that he is fully under contract in the United Kingdom, such a visit would have to be initiated from New Zealand.

He has many relatives there. Messrs A. J. Dowling solicitor of Dunedin, and W. F. Dowling and T. O. Dowling, both farmers of Ranfurly are brothers, and Mrs Neil McCarthy of Hawea Flat and Miss Stella Dowling of Ranfurly are sisters.

N. Z. born baritone joins his pupils.

A New Zealand born baritone who is the vocal consultant for the English National Opera has just completed a unique season performing on stage with his pupils.

Denis Dowling who will give only vague clues about his age, admits he is past the age when many singers have lost their form and been “put out to pasture”.

But as vocal consultant at the English National, Mr Dowling has been able to continue playing small roles on stage while teaching the Company’s principals, whom he says will become the top International stars in a few years.

He recently celebrated his 38th anniversary at the English National with his last performance in “Der Rosenkavalier “, and this week he started his new role as High Commissioner in “ Madam Butterfly “.

Now I can say, I have performed every male part in “Butterfly “. My repertoire with the English National includes about 70 roles Mr Dowling said.

I will never retire. I have the chance of giving the benefit of my whole singing career to younger people who have the physical stamina to do major roles.

Ambition.

For many years it has been my ambition to teach right in the heart of the theatre, where the stars come to me. If I were an ordinary teacher I would have to work with a lot of poor and mediocre students, whereas here I don’t have to waste my time.

Mr Dowling who last year visited Ranfurly, Central Otago, his hometown, for the first time since he left in 1935, said he did not think he would ever be able to go back to New Zealand to live, although he still considered himself a New Zealander.

I can remember riding to school in a horse and cart. In the depression years there was not much music in Otago, but my Mother thought I had talent, and she had a voice teacher come to me.

It was accepted in those days that if you wanted to do anything in music you had to go abroad. I won the Melbourne Sun Aria contest in 1934, and the next year I left for London. His career had just begun to progress when the War came, and he had to give it up.

Competitive.

The War was one of the reasons I was never able to go back to New Zealand. Afterwards, when I went back to England, I found I had lost ground to those who had stayed behind and established their reputations. Music is a competitive business. I could not afford the time, nor the money, to go back.

And now, it would be pointless to go back to New Zealand because if he found someone with talent, he would not be able to follow the person's career through. I would have to send my students back to England and my own standards would drop because there are not the opportunities to perform.

Home Visit by Baritone. 1976.

A New Zealand born opera singer, who has become an institution at Covent Garden and Sadlers Wells is returning home next month to show his wife the country he left 41 years ago.

He is Denis Dowling principal baritone and vocal consultant for the English National Opera, who left his Fathers sheep farm in Ranfurly, Central Otago, after winning the Melbourne Sun "Aria "in 1934 and came to England.

His last visit to New Zealand was in 1945, when he was granted compassionate leave to return and see his Parents.

But Mr Dowling remains a New Zealander at heart. On March 1st with his English wife Phyllis he will arrive at Auckland for a six-week visit. I am looking forward to it tremendously, it will be a total holiday, and we will move about at our leisure.

Much of the time will be spent with his two brothers and two sisters on Central Otago sheep farms. He wants to tramp on his father's old farm. And he insists on showing off to his wife, the most beautiful country in the world, and one which my ancestors helped pioneer.

It will be a welcome and well-earned break for Mr Dowling, who at present is performing in Strauss's "Der Rosenkavalier" the opera in which he made his British debut 37 years ago.

An interview with the Otago Daily Times 1976.

Probably, the most internationally renowned son of the Maniototo, opera singer Mr Denis Dowling returned to Ranfurly with his wife for a short holiday this week.

Mr Dowling was raised on his father's farm near Ranfurly and left the area 41 years ago. He is now principal baritone and voice consultant for the English National Opera, formally Sadlers Wells Opera Company. His rise to prominence as an opera singer, began when he won a number of competitions and society events in Dunedin and Christchurch between 1930 and 1934. In 1934 he travelled to Melbourne where he won the Centenary Sun "Aria" contest.

One was obliged, having won the biggest prize in the Southern Hemisphere, to further one's studies, Mr Dowling said at the Ranfurly home of his brother and sister.

Mr Dowling arrived in Great Britain in 1935 to study at the Royal College of Music and having been granted an operatic scholarship

[because he won the College audition] he furthered his studies at an operatic school, with a view to joining an operatic company.

As a result he made his debut in the then Sadlers Wells 1938-39 season production of "Der Rosenkavalier "by Richard Strauss.

This was the beginning of his operatic career, but while he was preparing for other roles the first shots of World War 2 broke out.

During the initial stages of the war Mr Dowling made many radio broadcasts, and gave a number of concerts for the troops, before being called up to serve in the European campaign.

After recovering from a post war throat operation, he went back to opera and concert work, singing the works of the new English Composer, Benjamin Britten at Glyndebourne and Covent Garden, before settling to a contract with Sadlers Wells Opera Company.

The development of his career began all over again and he has since sung more roles [70 in fact] than anyone else in the history of the Company, becoming known in the process for his interpretations of the major roles of Mozart, Rossini, Puccini and Donizetti.

Years of travelling and singing in Europe led to his becoming the senior operatic artist in Great Britain, and Mr Dowling is now senior principal and voice consultant to the English National Opera.

Mr Dowling said he held a unique position in that he was both singer and consultant at the same time. When I left Maniototo 41 years ago I did not think I would enjoy such a privilege. Yesterday he spent walking the farm on which he was raised, and which he saw last when he was home 31 years ago.

The Dowling's are to attend a family reunion on March 20th, before leaving Ranfurly for a brief tour of the South Island.

Who could forget that wonderful occasion, when in the Ranfurly Hotel we had 50 Family members present for this special banquet of welcome to Denis and Phyllis.

Earlier this year the New Zealand born baritone Denis Dowling, celebrated the 50th anniversary of a singing career which began when he won the Melbourne Sun "Aria "contest in 1934

That momentous year for professional singer, Denis Dowling. 1984.

This was a huge year for Denis as he actively wound down his participation on stage and in the rehearsal studios.

This is the notice for Denis's last performance in New York, followed by a history of his service to English Opera.

Denis Dowling. April 18th 1984.

Tonight's performance of War and Peace marks the last appearance with the English National Opera, at the London Coliseum for Denis Dowling.

Denis Dowling first sang with the Company 45 years ago and tonight's performance is therefore, both a celebration and a farewell.

Happily, he will be taking part in the ENO's forthcoming American tour giving his final performance with the Company in War and Peace at the Metropolitan Opera on June 29th.

Over leaf there is a tribute to Denis Dowling by Harold Rosenthal, Editor of Opera News.

A good question in a future operatic quiz might well be". Which ENO singer made his farewell appearance at the Metropolitan Opera, New York, although he never sang there with the Metropolitan Company"? The answer is likely to be Denis Dowling. When, in the form of the irascible Prince Nikolai Bolkonsky in War and Peace, he

storms off the stage in high dudgeon in the last performance of Prokofiev's opera on ENO's American tour, he will be making his final appearance in opera – and with the ENO – after a career that began in 1939, tonight is his last Coliseum appearance. How we are all going to miss him, though one hopes that his genial presence will long continue to be a familiar feature on first nights.

I do not suppose there is a single ENO regular who can recall a time when Denis Dowling's name did not appear in the list of artists during the last 35 years, and he would be right. His first appearance at Sadlers Wells, however, occurred when he was still a student at the Royal College of Music in 1939, it was as Faninal in the first Wells production of *Der Rosenkavalier* shortly before World War Two. The Marschallin in that production was Joan Cross, and when I spoke to her recently and asked her whether she remembered Denis's debut, she replied. "Of course, he was a gifted young man, you know, even in those days – far more so than..." and then very indiscreetly mentioned the name of another singer who had joined the Company at the same time..... We shared the same teacher Dawson Freer. After that debut, he was awarded the Tagore Gold Medal at the College as the outstanding student of the year. I still have a programme of the College's July 1937 production of Nicolai's "The Merry Wives of Windsor" in which Denis sang Ford under the baton of Malcolm Sargent.

That 1939 Sadlers Wells Faninal would, in normal circumstances, have lead to his joining the Company for the 1939 – 40 season on a permanent basis, instead, on the outbreak of War he joined the Royal Artillery, received a commission, took part in the Normandy landings and was mentioned in dispatches.

Had Denis Dowling not been in England at the outbreak of war he might well have served with the New Zealand Forces for that is where he was born, where he won prizes in local singing competitions, and where he started life as a sheep farmer. In 1934

he entered the famous “Sun Aria “competition sponsored by the Sun newspaper in Melbourne, which he won, and the following year came to the Royal College in London on an opera scholarship.

After demobilisation in 1946 he decided to resume his operatic career but was forced to abandon singing for a whole year owing to illness. In 1947 he was well enough to join the newly formed English Opera Group, singing with them for two years. It was while he was a member of the group that he made his only appearance at Glyndebourne – as Junius in the “Rape of Lucrecia “and Sid in *Albert Herring*, the role in which I first heard him. He repeated this part during the Company’s autumn season at Covent Garden that year – his only appearance there. In 1948 he sang Lockit in Britten’s version of “*The Beggar’s Opera* “, and then, in the autumn of 1949, joined the Sadlers Wells Opera and has remained a member of the Company, now the ENO, ever since.

His role at Rosebery Avenue was Silvio in *Pagliacci* followed, during his first season, by Falke, Escmillo, Angelotti, Guglielmo in *Cosa fan Tutte*, Yamadori, Kruscina in *The Bartered Bride*, Dancario in *Carmen* and the Showman in Vaughan Williams *Hugh the Drover*, his performance in that last mentioned role earned him praise from the Times critic who wrote of ‘his mellifluous voice and fine delivery’.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s he increased his repertory to well over 60 roles – the total now is considerably more than that, and slowly but surely, he consolidated his position as one of the most reliable members of the Company. His impeccable diction, feeling for words, immaculate timing, and sense of comedy made him a natural choice for such Rossini roles as Dandini, Raimbaud in *Count Orgy*, Taddeo in *The Italian Girl*, and of course, Figaro [later in his career he sang and acted a highly individual Bartolo], for Malatesta in *Don Pasquale*, Mozart’s Figaro and especially as Don Alfonso in *Cossi fan Tutte*. When the Gilbert and Sullivan operas came into the Wells repertory, Denis made the part of the Earl of Mountarrarat in

Iolanthe, particularly his own and when he sang ' When Britain really ruled the waves ' it became the highlight of the evening.

There seem to be few operas in the repertory in which Denis has not appeared, including many 'modern' works, beginning with the Police Chief in Menotti's *The Consul* and Ben in the same composer's *The Telephone*, Balthasar in Sutermeister's *Romeo and Juliet*, George Selincourt in *A Penny for a Song*, D'Armagnac in Penderecki's *The Devils of Loudun*, Sergeant Caquot in Gordon Crosse's *The Story of Vasco*, and the Commandant in *From the House of the Dead*.

Then there have been the countless character roles, like the Commissar of Police in *Rosenkavalier*, the Bonze and High Commissioner in *Madam Butterfly*, Alcindoro and Benoit in *La Boheme*. I have not termed these 'small' roles as do some people, but 'character' roles, for I remember the great Italian conductor, Vittorio Gui, saying that there are no such things as small roles, only small artists. And Denis Dowling when I recently told him that, agreed, saying that in a part like Prince Bolkonsky for which he said, he had had to look twice through the score before finding, the singer has to establish the character almost within seconds of making his entrance because after a few minutes he is off and that is that. Well, no one who has seen Denis in those countless character parts can forget the impact he made in them.

What have I forgotten? There have been the many BBC studio operas in the days when Stanford Robinson was in charge of the opera department there, including the title role in *Prince Igor*, and Fyodor Poyarok in *The Invisible City of Kitesh*, then there was Merlin in Purcell's *King Arthur* with the English Opera Group in Stockholm, and the roles in *The Merry Widow* and *La Vie Parisienne*.

With all this experience, is it any wonder that his advice is sought by artists young and old, and by aspiring students. Despite his outspoken comments and dry humour, he is both loved and revered

by all at ENO, and we all hope that after that Farewell he will continue to advise, encourage and contribute to the work of the Coliseum, and pass on his knowledge to those lucky enough to be able to study with him, thus ensuring the continuation of the English operatic tradition.

A really exuberant potted history of the value Denis's contribution to the world of Opera from such a long singing career, and the sheer distance between the Singing Farmer and International Stardom.

As Michael Dowling was present at Denis Dowling's final stage performance in New York in 1984, I requested Michael to contribute his first hand impressions of that event. His memories read thus.

I have very strong and fond memories of Denis, entertaining him here and enjoying his stories about Maniototo and Pine Terrace – our home.

I was fortunate to travel to New York and be with him and Phyllis for his last performance on stage for the Opera Company, at the New York Metropolitan Opera House, singing in the Opera "War and Peace", as Prince Bolconsky, written by Prokofiev. Thus, ending his stage career.

I joined them in New York and stayed at the same hotel, along with the Principals and Performers of this large cast. They were warm and friendly people.

For breakfast we went to a restaurant on top of one of the "Twin Towers" --- scary. I could not stand close to a window, and the "Statue of Liberty" was far below us.

I had crunchy bacon which was difficult to eat and of course it shattered all over the table, very embarrassing for me.

I met Denis backstage after a rehearsal.

I found it was a very complex system of circular stages, a far cry from where he started in Ranfurly. The last night of the Opera was a full house.

I took a suit with me but no need, people were dressed from suits to jeans.

Denis had a small part; Phyllis was able to warn me when he appeared. Denis commanded the stage while he was there, just a few minutes and his long career had come to an end.

The Company farewell party was held in the big front foyer of the Opera House. Opera Company Directors and fellow Principals spoke of his illustrious career, and Denis replied thanking everybody for their support and friendship.

The Company made a presentation of a large magnum of wine, the final presentation would follow back in London.

This was a beautiful crystal bowl on a matching stand inscribed with his name.

Denis Dowling

Sadlers Wells Opera Company 17/ 3 /39

and finished with the

English National Opera Company, New York 29/6/84.

“With Admiration and Affection from his Colleagues and Friends.”

Uncle Denis gave this wonderful gift to young Denis of Timaru when visiting London, with the request that it was to go home, and we are fortunate to have this trophy in our cabinet at “Pine Terrace “.

At the end of the Farewell function, I was given the magnum of wine to carry back to the hotel which was only a couple of blocks away.

Denis and Phyllis were wandering along with cast members, so I went on ahead on a different street. I stopped and talked to an old Negro man sitting on his doorstep, it was a very hot night.

I arrived back at the hotel rather late, as they were already there. I was then told in no uncertain terms, “ where the hell have you been, you are not bloody well in Ranfurly now “. These powerful words I will never forget, as he gave me a wry smile.

Having never had the opportunity to hear and see him in London at Sadlers Wells, I was very privileged to see him in New York, playing his final performance.

Michael Dowling Pine Terrace.

And a commentary from David Delany N Z Tablet 31/10/84.

Earlier this year the New Zealand born baritone, celebrated the 50th anniversary of a singing career which began when he won the Sun Aria Contest in Melbourne in 1934.

In June, he sang his last role in English National Opera, performed at the Metropolitan in New York.

In the Concert Programme series “New Zealanders Abroad “David Delany spent a delightful three quarters of an hour in conversation with Mr Dowling at his studio in Hampstead. Conveniently, they were close to the rehearsal rooms of the National Opera, and we enjoyed excerpts from many of Denis Dowling successes.

Denis Dowling has sung more than 80 roles during his outstanding career. In David Delany’s words, he has sung all the Mozart baritone parts and a wide range of other works across the modern and classical repertoire. In addition, he participated in the world

premiere of Iolanthe when the Gilbert and Sullivan works came out of copyright.

Although he is now in his 70s Mr Dowling came across as a cheerful, humorous person with enormous gusto and panache. His laughter is infectious and his singing magnificent. His interest in voice production and the care of young singers is of special significance for the future.

“Southern Voices “

Written by Adrienne Simpson and Peter Downs published 1992.

International Opera Singers of New Zealand.

When the Authors wrote about Denis Dowling in chapter 4, I gained a better insight into the achievements of the “Singing Farmer “ than from other sources, because they were members of that trade. They understood better the significance of singing under Malcolm Sargent, the most pedantic Conductor in London, a legend of his time. Of playing in the works of Ralph Vaughan Williams Composer and Conductor, and the wonderful letter he had from the Composer for his presentation of the Don in Don Giovanni, when in January 1953 Vaughn Williams wrote,

“ We admired your Don so much. Indeed, you go from strength to strength. Don Pasquale and Cosi were fine, but this tops them all “.

How Denis would have cherished that letter of praise, and reinforced his determination to present his character parts to a memorable standard within the acting industry.

And Lilian Bayliss, “The Lady “of British opera and theatre. In July 1937 she spotted Denis Dowling playing Ford in a Royal College presentation of Nicolai’s “The Merry Wives of Windsor “conducted by Malcolm Sargent, and afterwards asked Denis to contact her as

soon as he had finished his studies. Such an invitation was indeed a mark of high regard, almost the equivalent of a Royal Command.

Singer Joan Cross whom he first worked with on stage would be another strong supporter.

We cannot underestimate the influence on Denis from these prominent and famous people, when there were so many aspiring artists in London. It reinforces once again the sheer determination of Denis to fully extend his natural skills, and reward those who had supported him to travel and study.

To quote from this in depth article where detailed information of Denis's professional career is recorded, I reprint the opening page.

Opposite a good profile picture of Denis, the authors record his last performance thus.

When the curtain came down at New York's Metropolitan Opera on Friday 29th June 1984, few people in the huge applauding audience would have been aware that it was anything other than the end of a tremendously exciting performance of Prokofiev's War and Peace. Certainly, it had been the last presentation in a six-week, five city tour of the United States by the English National Opera, their first visit to North America, but for the members of that company the occasion had much greater personal significance.

As the house lights brightened and the audience drifted away, the people backstage gathered to pay homage to the singer who had been playing the baritone role of Prince Nicolai Bolkonsky. When the irascible old prince stormed off in high dudgeon at the end of his scene, it had marked the final appearance in opera of Denis Dowling, a greatly revered seventy-four years old who had first sung with the company an incredible forty five years earlier and had been with it continuously for thirty six years.

“How we are all going to miss him’ lamented that distinguished opera authority and critic, Harold Rosenthal”, though one hopes that his genial presence will long continue to be a feature on first nights.

As a performer, Denis Dowling’s first ‘first night’ had been in Dunedin on Saturday 7th October 1933, a popular young Otago singer, he played the leading role of Marquis Henri de Corneville in a production by the Dunedin Operatic and Dramatic Society.

One Dunedin newspaper reported that the acting and singing of the 23 year old had caused him to be acclaimed as one of the discoveries of the amateur stage. Another at the end of the season, went even further. Mr Denis Dowling made another profound impression on last night’s audience, and the quiet but effective manner in which he played his part, coupled with the high standard of his vocal numbers, must raise the hope that his first essay into the realms of musical comedy will be by no means his last.

So, his was a voice and stage manner that impressed his audience, and fellow actors.

Following a description of the young family attending the Ranfurly school, including the Government payment of sixpence a head per day horseshoe money, and as was customary in most rural communities, Denis left school at 15 to work on his father’s farm.

Now I quote,

Catherine Dowling his mother, was a skilled organist who played at the local Roman Catholic Church. His next eldest brother William [Bill] as a young man played the violin at nearby dances. Denis’s predilection for music was first noticed by his mother who observed how much time her son spent singing while going about his work on the farm. She encouraged this, yet his first experience of performing was not as a singer but as an instrumentalist in the local brass band. This he joined at seventeen, playing, appropriately enough, the

baritone. But he was already showing evidence of a good natural voice and two years later, at the age of nineteen, his mother decided it should be properly trained.

At that time a well-known Australian voice teacher, Fred Tuohy, travelled the 145 kilometres from Dunedin to teach in the district and he agreed to accept the young man as a pupil. With Tuohy's guidance and encouragement Dowling acquired the basis of the sound technique that was to stand him in such good stead in the years to come. Denis would always be grateful that he had found the right teacher at the right time, one who taught him so well and gave him so much sound advice.

After starting with Tuohy, he made rapid progress and from 1930 with only a year of tuition, he began to enjoy success in competitions, concerts and broadcasts from 4YA in Dunedin.

Judges' comments from the 1930 Dunedin Competitions stated, 'The winner Mr Denis Dowling, of simply delightful quality. He chose a song from musical comedy of a light humorous nature which he interpreted very well'.

In 1932 Baritone Solo, "Curfew " It was a song that offered great scope for expression and dramatic singing and the winner Denis Dowling in particular, took advantage of every opportunity for expression, with first class quality and diction.

And again, in the vocal solo, Mr Dowling the winner, chose good solos which made a great demand on his singing, and called for diction, breath control, tone control, imagination, and expression, which he carried out in full. Even at this stage clear diction was obviously a strong point for Dowling and it was to remain notably so for the rest of his career.

Following broadcasts on all the YA radio stations, he also sang at concerts in Dunedin and country districts, invariably accompanied at

the piano by Kathleen Whelan, whose father was well known in brass band circles, as conductor of the Kaikorai Brass Band and an Australasian tenor horn champion. In 1935 she was to marry the eldest Dowling brother, Anthony.

In 1933 Denis Dowling felt sufficiently confident to undertake the important role offered for October in *Les Cloches de Corneville* and was so acclaimed that before long it became increasingly difficult to fit in singing engagements with work on the farm. Clearly, he would have to decide about his future. That decision was made for him when he entered and won, on October 11th 1934, the Melbourne Sun "Aria" competition. The adjudicators were the renowned operatic soprano Florence Austral and New Zealand composer Alfred Hill, and such was their encouragement that he determined to aim for a career as a professional singer.

Alfred Walmsley a well-known Dunedin singer and teacher, and past student of the Royal Collage, had provided a letter of introduction, although to his embarrassment had forgotten to sign, so when Denis presented himself at the Royal Collage wishing to begin studies, Sir Hugh Allen director of the Collage, suggested he should study singing with the eminent Dawson Freer. After auditioning with a couple of arias he was immediately given an operatic scholarship that incorporated music and language classes as well as vocal studies. He settled down at once and made excellent progress.

And I quote more information about Lilian Baylis.

This formidable woman had for many years managed London's Old Vic Theatre south of the Thames, staging Shakespeare and her great love opera, on a very small budget and attracting loyal and ever-increasing audiences. In 1931 she raised enough money to rebuild Sadlers Wells Theatre north of the river in Rosebury Avenue, and there continued her policy of providing performances at prices ordinary people could afford.

At the Old Vic, drama became established and grew to become the National Theatre, while Sadlers Wells became the home of opera, always in English, and later ballet. The original Sadlers Wells Companies are now today's English National Opera and Royal Ballet. Lilian Baylis died in 1937 sometime before Dowling joined the company, but her interest in him was a great encouragement to a novice still making his way in the opera world, and reassured him that his decision to attempt a professional career had been the right one.

Following the risky but essential throat operation, performed by an Army medical friend in 1946, he was told by the Surgeon that any unnecessary use of his voice was to be encouraged, so there for, no singing was the rule to be followed. Denis, I believe accepted fully the Surgeon's advice, keeping himself occupied by working on the repair of their bomb-damaged house and garden.

At last in 1947 Denis felt his voice and energy level was such that he resumed training his voice, and seeking an opportunity to bridge, the loss of a 7 years war interrupted career.

Sadlers Wells Opera, itself recovering from the war years, was unable to offer him anything right away and he was released to work with a new company recently formed by the young composer, Benjamin Britten, whose opera Peter Grimes had been chosen to reopen Sadlers Wells Theatre in June 1945. This was a triumphant success, but Britten wished to work with a group of singers for whom he could write operas using smaller forces and which could be put on at less cost than the usual full-scale productions. He called it the English Opera Group and among its members were Joan Cross, Ellen Orford of Peter Grimes, Peter Pears, who had created the title role, and the conductor Reginald Goodall, later to become a noted conductor of Wagner.

Dowling was offered the roles of Junius in *The Rape of Lucretia* with Kathleen Ferrier in the title role, conducted by Goodall, as well as Sid in *Albert Herring* conducted by Britten. The performances took place at Glyndebourne, the theatre built in 1934 by John Christie in the grounds of his house in Sussex. Further performances followed at Covent Garden, Copenhagen, Oslo, Amsterdam, and the Lucerne Festival. Dowling had such success that he was invited to return to the Company the following year, 1948, to play in Britten's realisation of *The Beggar's Opera*, this time in Cambridge and Sadlers Wells Theatre, again conducted by Britten.

He was increasingly in demand for broadcasts by the BBC and at last, in 1948, felt well enough to take up again the arduous responsibilities of a hard-working repertory company with extensive touring commitments throughout Britain as well as its London season. He became a principal baritone with Sadlers Wells Opera where his career had been so abruptly interrupted nine years before. His association with this company was to continue until his retirement in 1984.

His early potential was quickly recognised. The first role assigned him, the tragically love-lorn Silvio in Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci*, was quickly followed by Dr Falke in the Johann Strauss operetta *Die Fledermaus*, Escamillo in Bizet's *Carmen*, Angelotti in Puccini's *Tosca*, Dancairo in *Carmen*, Kruschina in Smetana's *The Bartered Bride*, Sharpless in *Madama Butterfly*, and Guglielmo in Mozart's *Così fan Tutte*.

Thrust into the harsh realities of an operatic repertory system, Denis Dowling found that his life became a constant round of learning and sustaining new roles. But when a new production of Vaughan Williams' *Hugh the Drover*, was mounted in 1950 and Dowling played the Showman, he attracted some praise from the opera critic from the *Times* who drew attention to "his mellifluous voice and fine delivery". In this role too, Dowling discovered that a career as an

opera singer was not without its hazards. One evening James Johnston, the tenor singing Hugh, threw one punch too many as Dowling stood between the two protagonists, Dowling suffered three broken ribs and was off work for eight weeks.

Another role played with great results was as Figaro in Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*, where the *Spectator* columnist said, Denis Dowling's brilliant baritone and physical agility make him a most promising Figaro who with less interference, might give a most distinguished interpretation of the part. He was to make Figaro one of his most famous roles, both in the Rossini and later in Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*. Later he added the role of a highly individual Bartolo in the Barber, and a distinguished Count in Figaro. In fact, so well did he know these roles that in one performance of Figaro, when a colleague who had also sung both the Count and Figaro momentarily went wrong, Dowling prompted him to such good effect that before they knew it they were both singing each other's lines.

Dowling also sang another Mozart role as Papageno in *The Magic Flute*, and Guglielmo in *Così fan Tutte*, and a very sinister Don in *Don Giovanni*, for which he received that wonderful letter of appreciation from Vaughan Williams.

In Donizetti's *Don Pasquale* Dowling sang one of his favourite roles, which the *Sunday Observer* critic Eric Blom found specifically noteworthy, Denis Dowling makes a kind of benevolent puppet master of Dr Malatesta and sings the difficult part better than even famous Italians had been heard to do, with unaspirated ornaments. Commenting on E J Dent's new and amusing English translation of the opera, Blom added, the patter duet for Pasquale and Malatesta proves that English, skilfully used, comes off the tongue without twisting it, even at the fastest possible pace.

It was this role that Dowling achieved a feat seldom equalled when he sang three performances in one day. As part of a special promotion for the company, one cast was giving morning and afternoon performances at Bromley Town Hall in Kent. Concurrently another cast continued the opera in the normal evening repertoire at Sadlers Wells Theatre in London.

At that time, with far fewer performances of opera in Britain than there are now, and with far less opera yet on recordings, this was typical of the sort of enterprise singers were expected to undertake to promote opera and revitalise interest in it after the war years. During this particular double season Dowling one day received an urgent call from the management. The other Malatesta was ill, could he sing the performance that evening? So, after two performances in Bromley, Dowling sang a third in London later the same day. As he said afterwards, 'Well, at least I was well warmed up'.

Dowling's elegance of line and ease of coloratura helped to advance the growing Sadlers Wells reputation for presenting Rossini operas with great flair and wit. In 1959 he was cast in Douglas Craig's memorable production of *La Cenerentola*. Patricia Kerns, [the singer, I bought the side of lamb for, which they had for Christmas] astonished London in the title role with singing which was compared to that of Conchita Supervia at Covent Garden before the war. Dowling gave an unforgettable performance as Ramiro's valet, Dandini, who changes place with his master. In this role in particular, Dowling's skill and ability to heighten the comedy by underplaying it, all without distorting the music, were considered remarkable. To be able to sing Rossini's extended melodic line and fast moving fioriture, requires a technique and breath control that would tax any singer. And because these operas were sung in English, the audience could relish every turn of verbal wit in the libretto.

This production was taken to the Theatre Royal de la Monnaie in Brussels for the International Opera Festival in May 1960 and here it

enjoyed tremendous acclaim, the Belgian critic Paul Tinel singling out Dowling for special mention. Denis Dowling is a lyrical artist one rarely has the opportunity to hear. Superb voice, a vocal artistry of suppleness and astonishing agility and acting of stunning intelligence and subtlety.

The company followed up this success with Rossini's less familiar but deliciously ribald opera *Count Orgy*, in which Dowling was the obvious choice for Raimbaud the Count's confidant. Raimbaud's drinking aria in the second act is another baritone tour de force and Dowling's performance of it was said to be a lesson in technique and style to every aspiring singer in the audience. Later he was to achieve success as the elderly but vocally very agile Taddeo in the *Italian Girl in Algiers*, also by Rossini.

Performing always in English, singers with Sadlers Wells Opera knew that their audience would expect to understand the libretto, and Dowling's great care over diction and the projection of his words added immeasurably to his performances. It was a characteristic not overlooked by the critics. Rodney Milnes, the editor of the greatly respected and influential *Opera* magazine, writing on the subject of diction some years later, after the company had moved to its new home at the London Coliseum, cited him as a prime example. In thirty years, I have never heard Denis Dowling sing an incomprehensible word, and there are one or two singers at the Coliseum I wish he would bite.

Not all Dowling's roles were such good natured characters as Figaro or Malatesta, and so lifelike was he in one other that, for the only time in his career, the audience expressed clear disapproval. In the mid-1950s Sadlers Wells mounted a production of Menotti's *The Consul*. With Amy Shuard as the tragic heroine. After many fruitless attempts she is about to obtain another visit to the Consul's office. The door opens and a shadowy figure moves into the waiting room. As he turns, he is seen to be the feared Chief of the Secret Police,

and at the sight of her hated adversary, she faints. Dowling relishing the unsympathetic role, stepped over her prone body with a look of such utter contempt, that the audience visibly hissed.

Another less sympathetic role that Dowling nevertheless sang with great warmth and sensitivity was Germont in Verdi's *La Traviata*, but he startled his admirers by the fierce cruelty of his performance of the Commandant in Janacek's, *From the House of the Dead*. Harold Rosenthal wrote for his Opera magazine, Denis Dowling was a chilling and powerful Commandant, and added, who can give a lesson to everyone else in the matter of diction and projection.

By way of contrast, his most famous role in the lighter repertoire, was the Earl of Mountararat in Gilbert and Sullivan's *Iolanthe*. To hear Dowling's drawled vowels in his impeccably timed Gilbertian dialogue could almost have convinced any audience that he was a born and bred nineteenth century English aristocrat. Harold Rosenthal thought he made the part particularly his own, and that his rendition of "When Britain really ruled the Waves" became the highlight of the evening.

Dowling's work was not limited to Britain. Extensive tours with Sadlers Wells Opera in the 1960s took him all over Europe, including Geneva, Prague, Vienna, Hamburg, Munich and Berlin. In 1971 he gave performances of "overwhelming authority" as a Swedish critic described it, as Merlin in *King Arthur*. That production was taken to the wonderful eighteenth-century Court Theatre at Drottningholm, near Stockholm, with further performances in England at Norwich, the Aldeburgh Festival and the Promenade Concerts in the Royal Albert Hall, London.

And as recorded elsewhere Denis had roles in "modern" operettas, where he also achieved rave reviews for his character interpretations.

Asked why he worked only with British companies Dowling rightly points out that the opportunities for singers whose careers, like opera itself, were interrupted by World War 2 were far fewer than those available today. With every opera also requiring a double cast in case of illness, Sadlers Wells was less willing to release its artists for work elsewhere if it meant a long absence.

But they had no objection to members of the company accepting broadcasting engagements. As well as taking part in countless BBC concerts and programmes, Dowling gave some memorable studio performances in the Corporation's radio and television productions. These included Don Ferdinand in the 1949 world premiere of Roberto Gerhard's *The Duenna*, Poyarok in Rimsky Korsakov's, *The Invisible city of Kitezh* and the title role in *Prince Igor*.

In the course of his career Denis Dowling sang well over a hundred roles, during which time he saw Sadlers Wells Opera leave its old home in Rosebery Avenue in 1968 and move to the much larger Coliseum in St Martins Lane. Here its position in English operatic life was recognised in 1974 with a new title, English National Opera.

And in 1976 Dowling's contribution to English opera was itself recognised when he was invited to become vocal consultant to the company. For many years he had been admired for his readiness to coach and guide young artists and in this new capacity he not only taught singing but advised at auditions and helped singers to prepare their roles dramatically. Lord Harewood, then the managing director, paid Dowling the unusual compliment of telling him, 'We would like you to continue doing performances as long as you feel you would like to.'

In the same year at the age of sixty-six, Dowling gathered an impressive series of favourable reviews. The Financial Times critic believed his playing of the title role in Puccini's, *Gianni Schicchi* could hold its own on any stage, 'a quick witted impersonation sung so well

that people in the audience turned to one another in pleased astonishment.'

Of the same role the Stage critic declared he had added to his previous accomplishments by giving 'a brilliantly easy portrayal of the artful hero, both in his naturally rich voice and in his assumed croaking'.

His portrayal of Sir Tristram Mickleford's Flotow's, Martha was highly praised by the Daily Telegraph critic, who observed that he carried off this comic part 'without clowning and with a consistent musicianly humour, despite a bright red wig.'

When the English National Opera was given the signal honour of being invited to visit the United States in 1984, Dowling felt that such a significant event in the company's history would make a happy conclusion to his own stage career. Of the four operas Verdi's Rigoletto, Gilbert and Sullivan Patience, Benjamin Britten's Gloriana and War and Peace, it was from the last mentioned that he chose to sing the character role of old Prince Bolkonsky, a small part. Small though this, and many other character roles may be, the singer is obliged to establish his characterisation strongly the moment he appears on the stage because after a few minutes he will be off again. To carry off such scenes satisfactorily and with confidence requires great skill and experience.

So, at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York in 1984, by making his brief but terrifying presence felt as Prince Bolkonsky, Dowling gave his last stage performance. Afterwards he was the guest of honour at a company party where his long and meritorious association with Sadlers Wells and English National Opera was suitably celebrated and he was presented with a magnificent Lalique crystal centrepiece.

But this was not the last the public was to hear of the opera singer from Ranfurly, New Zealand. In 1990, sixty years after his first

broadcast in Dunedin, he accepted an invitation to take part in a BBC 2 television programme, *The Musical World of John Brecknock*, starring a tenor whom Dowling had discovered and had tutored in voice production and acting, and who is now a leading operatic singer. At the age of eighty Dowling partnered his protégé in a stirring rendition of Offenbach's famous 'Gendarmes' Duet'.

Dowling's views on singing are pragmatic and down to earth. Self-discipline and application in every aspect of one's work are paramount, he emphasises. A performer must always be thoroughly professional from every point of view. There is another matter he feels most strongly about, and which he believes is not always given sufficient weight by some singers. 'Being dazzled by technical jargon can kill the imagination required to interpret a role'. If verbal enunciation is indistinct, singing loses most of its dramatic delineation of character, making a performance dull and uninteresting. It is a fallacy to suppose that tone quality and even intonation can be independent of good verbal articulation. How often one hears performances of wordless ecstasy and passion from the operatic stage and concert platform. No matter what the reputation of the singer, for my book such performances do not add up to that of a complete artist.

As to his own career, Dowling without doubt enjoyed most the satisfaction of singing as a member of a company, with colleagues who knew each other and could therefore work as a team on stage within the disciplines of a well-rehearsed production. He has always remained grateful for the encouragement he received in New Zealand and for the support that enabled him to continue his studies in London. The War changed the lives of many and, with a living to earn, as he put it, his operatic career was inevitably based in Britain, which became his new home.

Denis Dowling and his wife now live quietly in the Highgate area of London where he continues to teach a limited number of students,

to offer valuable counsel to younger singers who seek his advice, and where he and his wife have provided warm hospitality to many New Zealanders and friends from all over the world.

I am grateful that authors Adrienne Simpson and Peter Downs wrote *Southern Voices*, an authoritative history of this great performer.

We have to admire the constant support given by Phyllis to enable Denis Dowling to attain such superlative commendations awarded, for her constant well informed support.

The Singing Farmer of Holly Lodge.

An interview by Colin Donne, published by the Holly Lodge Estate Committee. December 1992.

‘As a walled Estate, the two entrance gates were closed to non - residents each Good Friday.’

Denis Dowling the opera star, has made his home on the estate for an astonishing 45 years.

Do not be fooled by the gentle exterior. A few moments with this modest, quietly spoken gentleman reveal beneath the apparent elder statesman or favourite uncle, the fiery talent and will of steel which led from a remote New Zealand farm to resounding success on the stages of the world.

Denis was born the third of four sons on what he describes as “a sheep farm for pioneers in a lonely part of the country”. The expectation was, he says “You are brought up on the farm and then you stay on the farm.”, but we have his very different story in his own words.

It was all down to my mother. She thought I should have my voice trained. A semi-professional singer called Fred Tuohy gave me lessons and when I was 19 or 20, he sent me down to Dunedin to

sing in the local competitions. That was the start. I won nearly all the prizes and started singing in local concerts. In 1934 I went to Australia to compete in the Centenary Aria Contest in Melbourne, and won against all the experienced singers of the Southern hemisphere. That gave me the urge to travel and take a chance, in a slump there was not much to hold a third son on the farm, and if you think there is a slump today you don't know what a real slump is. I was just 25 when I arrived in Tilbury after five weeks on the P & O liner Strathaird. It cost 41 pounds tourist class, but that included two long train journeys and a ferry between, to get to the boat in Sydney from the farm at Ranfurly.

I had no friends or contacts in London when I arrived here with 15 pounds in five-pound notes in my pocket. I got my first beer in London free, because they would not accept a 5-pound note in the bar and it was all I had. I had arrived midterm at the Royal College of Music with a letter of introduction to the great Sir Hugh Allan from an ex-student of his in New Zealand. I arranged an interview with him and gave him the letter, but his ex-pupil had forgotten to sign it, so he had to take my word for who I was. I found digs in Earls Court, where a lot of the students stayed, and made many friends.

I went to the vocal teacher, Dawson Freer, and after a few months I was awarded an operatic scholarship, Sir Hugh gave me a grading after I took a test for him, and that enabled me to go in for the end of year prizes, from which I did well enough to finance a visit to Scotland to sing, and to stay for holidays on a farm with old colleagues of my father's. For three years I studied, and in the evenings I went to Sadlers Wells where a friend was working. My ambition was to take part with the leading singers in the national opera company.

It was hard work, but we had some good professors, and we did enjoy ourselves. We went wherever we could get free tickets, to theatres and concerts. Remember I had been at a little country

school a hundred miles from a city, and I had never seen Shakespeare until I came to this country.

All the time I was performing in small places all over the country and choral concerts, as you became more experienced you got better work, though you were not allowed to do much on a full time scholarship. The great Lilian Baylis heard my work at Collage and invited me to see her after I finished my studies as she might have something interesting for me. Although she died shortly after that, I auditioned for the role of Herr von Faninal in *Der Rosenkavalier* at Sadlers Wells in the 1938-39 season. My chance came when, at lunchtime one day, I was telephoned and they said "Can you sing the role tonight ?" I was well prepared and, although nervous, I went on and that was the start of my operatic career. My last performance in *Der Rosenkavalier* was 40 years later at the Coliseum.

When I left College I was awarded the Tagore gold Medal, named after the great Indian poet, as the most outstanding student of the year 1939. It was the first time the medal had been awarded to a singer and it was a great honour to me from my background. A letter then took five weeks to reach New Zealand, so my family was too remote to enjoy it with me, but of course they were thrilled.

At the start of the War, I volunteered for the New Zealand Army, but I was away entertaining troops and missed the call for the draft. So, I joined the British Army, was commissioned in 1943. I was well equipped for army life with my background, the drill and marching which so many found a terrible ordeal meant nothing to me. They were what I was brought up on, and I was as fit as a fiddle. After 7 months OCTU in the Welsh mountains, I was chosen, together with a much more experienced sergeant, to lead the marching out parade. He led the heavy parade, and I led the light, which was another honour for such an inexperienced soldier.

I went from Normandy right up to Lubeck. I was in the Royal Artillery, but my section of guns was attached to the infantry battalion, so we were at the sharp end. We saw a lot of fighting, in fact at one time casualties were so heavy that the battalion I was with ran out of men, and another battalion had to take over. By the end there were not many of the original battalion left.

I was with the battery chosen to look after Belsen until the line troops came to take over. I used to go back and forth there with messages and the stench of dysentery of thousands of people is something no one can describe. I organised the transport when the guards of Belsen were put through our lines, and I was bombed going across the Bailey bridge. I was mentioned in dispatches in Normandy. Then my war ended in Rhinefeld, and I had my first experience of opera again, listening to the premiere of Peter Grimes broadcast from Sadlers Wells on an old 19 set. Little did I think that not so long after that I would be singing in some of Benjamin Britten's operas.

When it was all over, I was in trouble with my throat and couldn't sing. I had an infection on the side of the vocal chord and had to have an operation at the Officers Wing at Woolwich which was nearly fatal. But I persevered with my exercises, while pretending I was too busy to take engagements to sing. It took 12 months for my voice to recover, by which time the roles I had been wanted for at Sadlers Wells were filled, so I joined the English Opera Group to sing operas by Benjamin Britten at Glyndebourne, Covent Garden and abroad.

I also did some broadcasting. Later I returned to Sadlers Wells which became the English National Opera. They loaned me to the English Opera Group in 1948 for a Scandinavian tour and several tours on the Continent, but then Sadlers Wells had so much work for me that they could not loan me out anymore. I became well known at the Coliseum in London, among over 100 contrasting roles, for interpretations of many of the Mozart and Rossini baritone roles. I

was under contract to Sadlers Wells, and they would loan me to the BBC for broadcasts or to other organisations for concerts.

The English National Opera expanded into bigger theatres and there were also many opportunities to travel abroad to sing. I had many dramatic and amusing experiences on stage. Once in *Hugh the Drover*, I had three ribs broken in the fight scene, and I had to get through my role as the prison governor in *Die Fledermaus* at one performance without Frosch the gaoler, who had not turned up. Once in *Figaro*, Rosin's letter slipped right down her dress to the floor when she was looking for it, where it should have been tucked into her bosom. In the *Barber of Seville* one night, Rosina was not where she should have been when I, as Bartolo, went to bring her in, and I had to run up the stairs for her, making up the lines as I went. And another time, in *Merry England* at Guildford, Jill all Alone was due to come on stage, but none appeared, and when I went to look for her I found her fast asleep behind the oak tree. On one occasion, in *La Cenerentola*, in Theatre De La Monnaie in Brussels, I saw the entire set starting to fall down towards the singers. Luckily a stagehand ran on and pulled it back, and I in my role went up and addressed my next line to him, which happened to be, 'What's all this noise about the place? And there were various incidents with split trousers and flying false teeth which almost broke me up into laughter on stage. But I think my proudest moment was in Monotti's the Consul, I played the terrible old Police Chief, and at the height of the most dramatic scene when the heroine faints after her aria and I step over her unconscious body, the audience booed and hissed me. A few moments before, they had been on their feet cheering Amy Shuard after her aria, then silence fell as I entered from the Consul's office and then the boos and hisses. I think that was my greatest compliment on stage.

Finally in my mid 70s with a grand send off at the Metropolitan in New York where I was performing the role of Old Bolkonsky in Prokofiev's War and Peace.

Sometimes the critics would say they couldn't imagine some opera without Dowling, but I was happy to survive so long and to make a contribution. I was vocal consultant for eight years, helping the young people, and that was a thrill to me to see a cast of people I had trained. Lady Harewood, wife of Lord Harewood the Director of the ENO, would say to me 'It's your opera tonight, Denis, isn't it'. I say to young people starting today, don't be in a hurry. It's a long exacting study, with many sacrifices to be made, but I have seen wonderful voices ruined through people who would not discipline themselves to learn all aspects of the profession. I remember saying one day to our director 'I've seen enough good talent destroyed through bad direction and advice to make another two opera companies.'

In such a long career, you see the wheel go round. In some periods the conductors are the major influence, sometimes it is the librettist, and most often the producers and designers. I am a stickler for the correct period. Nothing is more charming than the period which was intended for the opera, and the music that was set to it which suited that particular period. Some of the modern productions seem to have been designed for television. During an important aria when concentration should all be on the singer, there is distracting fidgety movement going on all over the stage. I saw a Don Giovanni the other night with half a dozen nude statues rolling about while the Commendatore is putting Don Giovanni to death. There is a lot of work done and money spent which is not improving the opera at all. So much money today is wasted by designers producing opera sets which do not work. I am not sorry to be out of the profession, because now there are so many professional disagreements, and people just down from university who think they know everything.

My colleagues and I had to establish ourselves before there was any Arts Council to pay the piper. I say to some of today's people, 'If there were no Arts Council, you would not be in work'.

I met my wife Phyllis, when I was in the army, and she was a dancer with her sisters. We were both entertaining the troops, and we met at Queen Mary's 74 birthday concert and married two years later. When I came back from the War, we lived with friends on the Holly Lodge Estate, and we liked it very much, so we bought this house. At that time, it was a godsend that Phyllis had kept up her career, because I was not able to do anything after my throat operation.

My wife thought I was mad to buy a house at such a time, but I said, 'The house will only get more expensive if we wait.' I suppose it was my childhood background, when we were always in debt. My father used to say 'The more you're in debt, the more ground you have which is going to come good someday.'

I liked the way the estate was run, and I have liked it all the way, but for the last years, I think the Council has made it difficult for the committee. Some friends have died or moved away but if we were to move, say to a smaller place, where would we go? We know our friends and we know our neighbours. Once you leave here you are with strangers.

We all say "Hear, hear" to that and wish Phyllis and Denis many happy years here among their friends. Colin Donne.

Editorial note.

There were about 280 houses on the estate, with about 2500 residents.

This is the copy of a letter written by Denis Dowling to Kerry Dowling in June 1996.

I came to London in 1935 on the P & O liner Strathaird, my trip and living expenses were paid for by the prize money from winning the

Centenary Sun Aria singing contest in Melbourne in 1934, and Concerts in Dunedin and elsewhere. I joined the Royal College of Music London for advanced studies, was awarded an Operatic Scholarship and in 1939 was awarded the Tagore Gold Medal for the 'best all-round student'.

That same year I made my debut in the National Opera House, Sadlers Wells as Herr von Faninal in Der Rosenkavalier and had other roles preparing for a full operatic career. But the threat and outbreak of War, closed all forms of entertainment, operas, concerts and broadcasting I had booked were cancelled, and like many others, my whole life was saddened and changed overnight.

After Army training, I joined the 58th Light Anti-Aircraft Artillery Regiment in the 11th Armoured Division as a Lieutenant. I took part in the invasion of Normandy and was in action throughout the campaign, up to Lubeck in Germany. I was mentioned in dispatches in Normandy and was proud later on to learn I also had a recommendation for the Military Cross.

My childhood was that of most farming kids, we drove to school in a horse and cart. You did the rabbiting, milking cows and gradually making your way in to the general farm work. Things were tough as we were nearing the world slump, something I believe you have yet to experience. My Father was a hardworking man who at the turn of the Century acquired a large area of tussock land to turn into a farm.

He built a barn which became our home until 1925. This brings me to my Mother – to my mind the most important person in the Dowling setup. The years of toil and heartbroken inconveniences to bring up a large Family, and always on call to help other people's problems, playing the organ in Church every Sunday and many times herself suffering indifferent health, made her the perfect example of many early farmers wives in the Maniototo, whose work did so much for the development and dignity of the area.

She also nursed back to health her two brothers Leo and Val after the 1ST World War.

Your Grandad. During the world slump the farmers found that to make a better success of the situation changes had to be made in their farming habits. The new generation had to take over. He belonged to that generation, and he was the leader in our Family to raise the standards of cultivation and livestock, and it was that change and effort that made the Dowling holdings enjoy some important position in the District.

My return to my profession was delayed after the War. During the battle of Normandy, I was blown up, which affected my chest somewhat, and an infection developed in my throat which required an operation, but after a long period of gentle treatment I recovered, and was to enjoy many years of operatic and concert work. I performed more than 150 roles, which I sang in many Opera Houses, here and on the Continent, and also enjoyed much broadcasting , TV presentations and Concerts in many Cities.

Before I retired I was also Vocal Consultant to the English National Opera Company at the Coliseum in London for 8 years, and had the pleasure of helping many young stars.

I was happy also, that all my activities enjoyed a good press.

I hope this covers most of your questions.

DVD (Denis Valentine Dowling)

Denis Dowling died in London on the 2nd of October 1996.

There were many eulogies written following the death of Denis Dowling, I reprint the eulogy spoken at his funeral by Richard Fisher, Administrator of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, London.

First the singer, the beauty of the voice itself, a warm, rich baritone, produced with that marvellously secure technique, the long poised legato line, and at the same time a breath taking ability to negotiate the most taxing coloratura with not an aspirate in sight.

Then the actor, Denis always sought for the character in the music, and the words of the opera. For Denis the character always grew to life out of those, and he never attempted to impose himself on a role.

His professionalism was beyond reproach. He had had to discipline himself from boyhood on a busy farm, where a great many jobs had to be done every day, whatever the weather or his personal inclination, and on time, and he carried that self-discipline into his life as a singer. He had no time for those who did not know their music, who turned up late for rehearsal, or constantly made excuses.

But all this was only part of the man. There are not many of whom one can say that whenever their name is mentioned, it can be guaranteed to make people smile. The moment one thought of Denis, one smiled. He was a man of such warm humanity, such generosity of spirit, self-effacing and totally unselfish in his concern for others, and his refusal to talk about his own troubles, that everybody enjoyed his company and felt the better for talking to him. And though he could not have been more serious about his profession, he never took himself too seriously and could laugh at himself without embarrassment.

Life had not been easy for him. He had hardly started his career when War broke out, and while he made light of some of his wartime

experiences, there were other things that he did not talk of. I never did discover exactly what he had done that resulted in his being mentioned in dispatches, and he rarely mentioned Belsen. And only recently his wife came across a letter, written years later, thanking him for his kindness to her family during the war, with so many of the local people near to starvation. Denis had done what he could to ease their pain with a generous supply of army rations.

He narrowly escaped death, but two explosions, which filled his lungs with chaff and dust, meant a serious operation to his vocal chords after the war. He lost a year's work, and nearly lost his voice. Then after resuming his career, he was stuck down with TB, his career jeopardised yet again. One cruel relic of that illness was to remain. In the middle of a performance, he found his memory would suddenly fail and his mind go blank. This gave rise to a host of stories about his ingenious improvisations whenever this happened, but we should never forget what agony it was for him every time it occurred.

However, had it not been for the war he would not have met Phyllis whom he married in 1943. From then on, she was to be by his side supporting him, encouraging him and, dare I say it, just occasionally restraining him, for the rest of his life.

Denis was quite devoid of envy and considered it a duty to help younger singers less experienced than himself. On one occasion at the Coliseum in the course of a discussion about young singers, following some stage auditions, a young conductor in the room turned to him and said, 'but Denis this isn't a teaching institution you know'. I have never seen Denis so angry. He restrained himself with great difficulty, but never forgave that remark.

One aspect of his concerns for others was his work for the Catholic Stage Guild, and for many years he was also Chairman of the Principal's Committee with the company, taking up with management the concerns of his fellow principals. And not in a

combative way. He had a very shrewd understanding of the problems of management, with the result that when Denis spoke, you listened and took notice.

Outside music Denis's greatest interest was probably rugby, which he had played as a young man, and of course, his garden. He considered himself thoroughly British, as indeed he was, but there was no question which side he was supporting when England or Ireland were playing New Zealand.

If anyone ever truly fulfilled that great commandment to 'love thy neighbour as thyself' it was Denis, for to him, everyone was his neighbour, and he would talk freely to anyone he met. Visits to the local Waitrose store turned into a truly royal progress, his voice booming across the aisles as he talked to the staff. His voice projection was legendary, and when Phyllis once apologised for the noise emanating from 13 Hillway she was told, 'Oh, don't worry, as long as we can hear him, we know he's alright'. He sang going upstairs and coming downstairs, he sang in the little hut at the end of the garden, and he was apparently in particularly splendid form while washing his hair. And let us never forget the generous warm hospitality which he and Phyllis extended to so many people from all over the world over so many years.

Not long ago I was reading Pilgrims progress and thinking about the opera that Vaughan Williams based on that book. And I started wondering idly how one might cast the opera with regard only to character, not voice. One baritone sprung to mind as an ideal Mr Hypocrisy, several tenors would make an excellent Mr Obstinate, a number of sopranos or mezzos who would be very good as Madam Bubble, and possibly one or two might not find it too difficult to fill the role of Madam Wanton. But there is one character about which I was in no doubt at all, for if anyone sought the truth, and fought for the truth, throughout his life it was Denis.

Valiant for truth in demanding artistic integrity at every level.

Valiant for truth in his strong Christian faith.

Valiant for truth in all his dealings with his colleagues, his family, his friends, and all those he encountered along the way.

He touched so many lives, he touched all our lives, and we are deeply blessed that he did.

‘After this it was noised abroad, that Mr Valiant for Truth was taken with a summons by the same post as the other and had this for a token that the summons was true’.

‘That his pitcher was broken at the fountain, when he understood it, he called for his friends, and told them of it. Then said he, I am going to my Father’s and though with great difficulty I am got hither, yet now I do not repent me of all the trouble I have been at to arrive where I am. My sword I give to him that shall succeed me in my pilgrimage, and my courage and skill to him that can get it. My marks and scares I carry with me, to be a witness for me, that I have fought his battles who now will be my rewarder’.

‘When the day that he must go hence was come, many accompanied him to the river side, into which as he went, he said, death where is thy sting. And as he went down deeper, he said, grave, where is thy victory, so he passed over, and all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side’.

Richard Fisher. 23/9/96 Rest in Peace.

There were six obituaries noted in the folder, each a slight variation of a syndicated release, but without question, generous in their praise of Denis’s long and meritorious career. In the world of opera and entertainment, he had become a “living legend.”

The columns were ... The Guardian, The Times, The Independent, the Evening Post, and Sunday Star Times, all of London, and the Otago Daily Times.

In an Otago Daily Times Obituary, headlined, 'Baritone began career in Dunedin,' John Dowling noted, 'that his Uncle was a very warm person who had an engaging personality.'

'He loved his visits back to New Zealand. His home was always very open to family and friends, and he was almost like a Father to many of them.'

In a letter to Mary Lampen- Smith sometime later, Phyllis described the Memorial Service, with these words.

The Memorial Service was wonderful, four leading Singers, Chief Conductor, Chorus Master to play the organ, and a Chorus of 25 sang. I don't have to tell you what it sounded like.

'I felt so proud, and I know Denis would have to. We went back to the Coliseum afterwards to drinks, and I have never been kissed and hugged so much. I knew he was loved – but NOT to that extent. I wish you had been there to.'

John and Helena Dowling were with Phyllis, and she noted how supported she had been by their presence, and all the messages from New Zealand.

Denis's ashes were brought back to New Zealand.

Denis has been interred in the same grave as his parents

William G Dowling	27 January 1945	aged 73
Catherine Dowling	12 August 1945	aged 73
Denis V Dowling	23 September 1996	aged 86

When Phyllis died her ashes joined them

We were fortunate to receive the well wrapped box of Denis Dowling material from Phillip Richardson of London on the 19th January 2023. This included items right back to 1935 when Denis arrived in London and presented himself to the Royal College of Music, with his unsigned Letter of Introduction from past Pupil Alfred Walmsley of Dunedin.

Having gone through a wide range of information, I now believe that this new information should be added to the present script, rather than inserting interesting tit bits into what is written. I think that will provide a more interesting history.

The information from Phillip reinforces yet again, how Denis Dowling the humble 'Singing Farmer' from Maniototo, rose to the exorbitant heights that he did in the International Operatic World of Singing and Acting. By staying with the one Company Sadlers Wells later the English National Opera Company, he rose from a junior Singer to a full time employee, following his appointment as the Company "Singing Consultant". A young Lad who taught himself new music playing the piano with one finger, was now setting the standard of Singing and Acting for the Company. No wonder he was so proud when Lady Harewood would say to Denis after a show, "This was your show tonight, wasn't it". They could see the difference in quality, and presentation. So let us travel the journey, as did Denis all those years ago.

1934. Denis Dowling has sung his Arias and other music in Ballarat, Australia, and been selected among the eight finalists to sing in Melbourne.

An introductory item in the newspaper leading up to the final says, the baritone Denis Dowling is another of the New Zealanders selected at Ballarat by Professor Bernard Heinze to sing among the eight on Thursday night in Melbourne. He comes from Ranfurly and studies in Dunedin with Mr F M Tuohy. During the past three years he has been gaining occasional experience at small concerts in the south of New Zealand.

Remember, there were 93 Singers who entered the competition at Ballarat, the majority of whom had received professional tuition for several years. So Denis could well be considered the “under dog.”

“ The Sun’s “ Discoveries, New Singers of World Promise.

As a musical event of prime importance in connection with the Victorian Centenary Celebrations, the “ Sun “ Centenary Opera Aria Contest occasioned enthusiasm, which was quite unprecedented in the annals of such contesting in Australia. The diffidence of Melbourne citizens on the subject of contesting, which has been notorious for many years, no matter what efforts have been made, was entirely overridden on this occasion.

The Melbourne Town Hall was so crowded that some hundreds of latecomers had to be sent away disappointed. Those who had obtained admission to the hall were rewarded with the finest singing contest in the history of Australian music, the co-adjudicators Madam Florence Austral and Mr Alfred Hill, finding before them eight finalists, chosen during the previous weeks at Ballarat, all of whom are of great promise, while at least one or two in addition to the three eventual prize winners, may be regarded as sound potential claimants to fame in Australia and beyond. All possessed beautiful voices.

The reaction of the audience of 2500 people at this contest were wonderful to observe. Until the close of the singing, and the announcement of the results at 11.30, the assemblage remained

seated, and kept up as keen a display of interest as though it had been brought up on competitions, as in Ballarat. While Madame Austral and Mr Alfred Hill were sorting out their records of the singing, two former “ Sun “ Aria winners gave items. The ‘ Suns’ Centenary gesture covered the whole of Australia and New Zealand, the winners of the first prize money of 130 guineas in all, and second prize money of 30 guineas both hailing from the sister Dominion, while the third is a South Australian.

The winner, Denis Dowling is a pupil of Mr F M Touhy in Dunedin. Mr Touhy went there from Melbourne.

Second prize went to Miss Hinemoa Rosieur, a dramatic soprano also from New Zealand, who has been in Melbourne for some time as a student under Miss Mary Campbell at the Albert Street Conservatorium.

Third prize was Alan Coad, also a baritone, who has been studying at the Elder Conservatorium in Adelaide for the past two years.

The Sun’s Musical Critic Thorold Waters said, This boy made a magnificently effective climax, and the dynamics of his voice were superlatively beautiful all through. A moderate amount of gesture aided his expression.

The Prologue to Pagliacci afforded an even more pronounced light on Denis Dowling’s extensive range, and grand possibilities as a baritone of opera.

The fact that the two baritones succeeded one another afforded an opportunity of close comparison, the New Zealander Denis Dowling submitting Eri Tu from Un Ballo in Maschera, in the first place, his mellow light baritone making a slight nervous deviation from pitch in the introductory measurers, but following this up with true, beautiful cantabile and pathetic elements in the main melody.

So, despite Denis lacking both professional training and competition experience, he was awarded top prize through his voice, and personal dedication to the people in New Zealand who supported him. No wonder he said “it was back to the farm I suppose”, he had not thought beyond the Aria competition.

There were photographs of the three placed Singers, looking as though they were relieved and happy, not a hair out of place, and of Denis with his accompanist Miss Myrtle Liddy.

It was absolutely clear that the adjudicators were both so impressed with the singing of Denis Dowling, that they strongly suggested a career in opera should be considered. With the winning margin of 23 points, from miniscule professional training, clearly Denis possessed a voice of incredible promise. The judges were emphatic that Denis Dowling should pursue his studies in Europe, as they were confident that he possessed the rare essentials of a successful vocal career.

And Alva Myers of Otago, a soprano, in some respects had the most powerful voice heard in the whole of the contest, rang with splendid limpidity throughout the big hall. In both her Arias the cantabile measures were beautifully sustained, and the emotional appeal in Gluck’s classic was well conveyed.

The husband of Madam Florence Astral, the world famous Flautist John Amadis, even wrote a Letter of Introduction to Madame Schoen Rene’, at the Juillard Institute of Music, New York, for Denis if by chance he wished to study there.

So, the community of Maniototo and beyond, who had financially supported his trip to Melbourne, were well rewarded for their generosity.

A note about the Sun “Aria “ competition. Originally it was proposed as a mark of respect from the Melbourne People, for those Servicemen and Women who died fighting the First World War.

Commencing in 1924, Denis Dowling was the first New Zealander to win this Competition in 1934, three other New Zealanders won this prestigious competition, Malvina Major 1964, Kiri te Kanawa 1965, and Lynne Cantlon 1966, when recorded in "The Singing Voices."

Forward to 1935 and the Otago and Southland wide effort to raise sufficient funds to travel to London, and sufficient funds for two years of tuition at the Royal College of Music.

23rd of May 1935.

Dunedin's popular baritone, Farewell at the Town Hall.

"Shakespeare, to whom we still look for wisdom" said the Mayor, the Rev. E T Cox, at the farewell given to the popular and accomplished Dunedin baritone, Mr Denis Dowling in the Town Hall last night "said words that could be applied appropriately tonight. He said that some men were born great, some men achieved greatness, and others had greatness thrust upon them." I think that Denis Dowling comes under the second of those classes. Born with a gift of song, with a voice capable of great possibilities, I am confident that with the help of the people of Otago he will come out as one of the world's leaders of song.... Applause.

The Mayor said that great art belonged to the world, it only found its true expression in the life of the world, and so, having discovered the possibility of this voice, it was a privilege as well as the duty of their citizenship to render the assistance that was needful, in order that this latest talent might be brought to full fruition. A small group of citizens mostly associated with music, had worked very hard during the last few months to secure the needed funds. Mrs Balking King of Ranfurly had led the movement in Central Otago, with the result that a considerable amount had been added to the fund.

Mr Dowling who was received with loud applause, said that he had many thoughts running through his head that night--- many happy

thoughts--- but he realised he could not say them all. He could not say enough to express his thanks to them for arranging for him to go abroad to study singing under the great teachers of the world. He desired to thank sincerely all those who had helped in the movement to assist him. They were giving him an opportunity that few other centres in the Dominion have given their young singers. The only thing he could say was that he would guarantee that, if hard work brought its reward, he would do his best to repay what had been done for him in Otago and Dunedin. He could assure them that he would keep his nose to the grindstone in the Old Country.--- Applause.

He hoped sincerely that he would be able to come back and show them that their kindness had not been in vain, and that he had done something which warranted, the trouble the people here had taken to give him his chance. Mr Dowling concluded among loud applause by thanking the people of Dunedin and Otago from his heart for their financial and moral support.

There followed a wonderful night of singing and entertainment by over 20 performers and groups, including two sessions of community singing, culminating with Denis Dowling singing “Goodbye” from White Horse Inn. Kathleen Dowling was his accompanist.

And then into full training at the Royal College of Music London, while living at Earls Court where many other young people were boarding. We know that he was an active student, learning a wide range of skills to be used in professional life.

And as a student he was cast in various student productions by the Director, including the first to be cast as Falstaff in “John in Love” an opera written ten years before by Ralph Vaughan Williams, who as Denis later discovered was a tremendous fan of his singing and acting.

The background to this opera is old Windsor, leafy and river haunted. In the second act Falstaff sings a love song captivating old England. In other words, a romantic reminder of times past. Of Denis Dowling's performance it was said, a singer of whom we shall hear more.

Denis sat and passed his Certificate of Proficiency in April 1938, and received his ARCM. on 30/6/1938.

Leith Hill Festival, "Elijah" at Dorking.

At about half- past two on Saturday afternoon the High Street at Dorking was full of people hurrying down the hill, clasping to their bosoms vocal scores of Mendelssohn's Elijah. This was the score that Denis learned to sing at home when he had no tutor, and he learned the music playing the piano with one finger. Dr Vaughan Williams had drawn together over 400 voices from 18 small villages around Leith Hill.

The outstanding quality of this large choir was actually its tunefulness in tone and intonation. ' Help Lord ' began with a thrilling moment, others of the broader choruses sang "Thanks be to God " and " Be not afraid " sounded remarkably rich and well balanced. It was noticeable that the men were placed well forward that they might not be eclipsed by the stronger sex, and the tenors showed that they could not only sing the notes ,but produce a genuine tenor tone. " He that shall endure " was a most beautiful piece of choral singing.

The orchestra , local and some professional leaders and wind players from the Royal College of Music played excellently on the whole, but suppleness in the accompaniment of such a work as Elijah is difficult of achievement, and in more than one instance there was danger of the orchestra and the solo singer [Denis Dowling as Elijah] parting company. Two other young RCM solo singers were also contributing at the beginning of what should be successful careers, for all three were admirable in voice, style, and intelligent treatment of their

music. The last hymn “lift thine eyes” instead of just 3 angels, there were upwards of 300 singing angels.

About 1938. Sang for the Queen, New Zealander Honoured.

Mr Denis Dowling of Ranfurly. An Empire Tea Party.

Two Scottish songs were sung for the Queen by Mr Denis Dowling at an afternoon party given by Lady Frances Ryder and Miss Macdonald of the Isles.

Mr Dowling sang “The Pibroch “ by Charles Stanford and “Kishmul’s Galley “ by Margaret Kennedy- Fraser. He was afterwards presented to her Majesty, who thanked him for singing, and told him how much she liked the songs.

The Queen knows much more about the songs than I do, Mr Dowling admitted. “Kishmul’s Galley” is an old Hebridean poem which has been saved by Margaret Kennedy -Fraser. The Queen said how much she liked the music written to the words. She knew all about its history. She was charming to talk with, and it was an experience I shall never forget. I was quite surprised to find how much she knew about the songs.

The party was given for Officers from the Dominions in His Majesties forces in Great Britain, Rhodes Scholars and dominion and colonial men and girl undergraduates. It was held at Seaford House lent by Lady Howard de Walden, who also gave the tea.

To many of them the Queen talked, asking where they came from and where they were staying in England, what were their particular studies and interests, and similar informal enquires. Passing from room to room where groups of students were assembled her Majesty spent about an hour and a quarter moving among them and displaying a close interest in their affairs. Particularly she discussed with Canadian and American students their Majesties forthcoming visit to Canada and the United States.

N. Z. Baritone Triumphs in British Opera.

A New Zealand baritone who has won critical acclaim in the English Opera Group's season at Covent Garden in recent weeks is Denis Dowling, late of Ranfurly. He sang important roles in "The Rape of Lucretia" and "Albert Herring", two operas by the foremost of present day younger English composers, Benjamin Britten.

Music reviews in the press these days are cut to a minimum because of drastic newsprint cuts. Sometimes they are reduced to a mere four or five lines of print. Forced to confine themselves to mentioning one or at the most two of the artists, many critics chose to include the name of Denis Dowling.

His principal aria in "The Rape of Lucretia" won him prolonged applause on every night of the season, while a number of famous English critics singled out his beautiful duet with Nancy Evans in "Albert Herring", one of the highlights of this delightful comic opera.

Denis Dowling won the aria contest at the Melbourne centenary festival in 1935, and came to London to study at the Royal College of Music. Prior to leaving New Zealand he was publicly farewelled in the Dunedin Town Hall. In July 1938 he was awarded a John Astor Fund grant for a further year, and later won further prizes. In July 1939 he received the Tagore Gold Medal for the "most generally deserving pupil" and also won the Arthur Benjamin prize for the best operatic performance of the year.

His success is well deserved for he is one of the strongest members of a most talented cast, selected from the finest singers on the British stage today. Not only is he the possessor of a magnificent baritone voice, but he brings to bear upon his work a keen musical sense combined with a deep insight into the psychology of the roles he portrays. Opera lovers will know only too well that voice, and intelligence, are not always found together.

His voice is perhaps not as powerful as that of one or two other baritones in Britain, but it is rich and full, and his enunciation is so perfect that every word can be heard, even when he is singing against the full battery of Britten's orchestra, which although of "chamber "size, nevertheless at times seems to possess more than its share of percussion instruments.

After leaving the college he played Falstaff in Vaughan William's Opera " Sir John in Love ", and after that sang in a variety of roles, consistently earning himself good Press notices. He was a member of an E.N.S.A. party which gave a command performance before Queen Mary on her seventy fourth birthday, and was afterwards complimented upon his performance by the Queen Mother.

For nearly six years during the war, Denis Dowling was out of the profession. He was commissioned in the Royal Artillery, and landed in Normandy with the 11th Armoured Division. For his service in Normandy he was mentioned in dispatches. He has been heard singing on the B.B.C. recently being selected for a solo part in a Berlioz opera by that most exacting of modern English conductors, Sir Thomas Beecham.

With his successes in leading roles in the recently formed English Opera Group, a non-profit making company which works in association with the Arts Council and the well-known British Council, he may be said to be at the height of his career.

If this group is able to make satisfactory arrangements for a tour to New Zealand and Australia in 1949, as its Directors wish, New Zealanders will have the opportunity to hear Denis Dowling singing these roles in both operas, which would be included in the company's repertoire. So wrote Harvey Blanks.

High Praise, Denis Dowling in Opera, A Fine Performance.

Mr Denis Dowling of Ranfurly, who is leading baritone in the Sadlers Wells Opera Company, caught the critics' attention recently for his performance of Figaro in the "Barber of Seville".

By common assent he was the outstanding figure in a controversial production staged by the well known producer Tyrone Guthrie. He was always debonair and dynamic in his role and for this and his powerful, well modulated voice, he received very warm applause. His renderings of Figaro's famous aria and the "Largo al Factotum" were especially fine.

It was quite evident that in Denis Dowling Sadler's Wells have another outstanding baritone with a big future before him, wrote the Musical Times. "His Figaro was remarkable well sung and acted ". In a subsequent issue of this paper the foremost British critic Arthur Jacobs, singled him out, together with James Johnston and Anna Polak of Covent Garden, as one of the three best performers of the present opera season.

In further notices of his Figaro role the Spectator said, "Denis Dowling's brilliant baritone and physical agility made him a most promising Figaro. Who with less interference, might have given a most distinguished interpretation of the part. The Daily Telegraph said his fine baritone was admirably suited to the part, while The Times after roundly condemning the energetic production commented, "from the wreckage can be saved the well defined Figaro of Mr Denis Dowling, whose voice has filled out, but has not become unmanageable in mezzo voice and patter. The Daily Herald said he "triumphed as Figaro" and the News of the World spoke of him as "excellent".

Dowling is having a very busy time these days with frequent broadcasts and concert roles from Aberdeen to South Wales. His next big role at Sadlers Wells is as Guglielmo In "Cosi Fan Tutti "by

Mozart. He has also leading parts in B.B.C. productions of the difficult and seldom produced operas "Kitesh" and "Duenna".

An interesting cartoon by Fred May in one of the English papers shows Denis Dowling dressed as a roman soldier wearing his metal front plate, during his performance as Junius in the Rape of Lucretia.

We have a cablegram of a size I had not seen before, to send messages to the troops. One such is from his Mother dated 14/10/1944. Mrs W G Dowling, Ranfurly.

My dear Denis and Phyllis, I hope you are both well and everything going good. We have had quite a wintry change this week, nothing new Denis during lambing season is it. Between wind rain and snow showers and frost at night , it is just middling. At present the mountains are covered in snow, but this time of year it will soon disappear I suppose. I forget if I mentioned about Frank Creighton having called to spend a few days with us his ankle is still sore but has improved a lot since his return. Tom had returned from the Pacific. He has gone to England to work at his job in the Post Office for the duration. Kelvin O'Connell has also gone to England.

Denis, Dad hasn't been feeling too well of late and decided to go to Dunedin for an xray, he had 5 plates, and the plate didn't show anything so he will be more satisfied. He went into the Mater and will stay a day or two at Tony's before returning. I think it is just the spring and not having any recreation during the winter, now when he returns and the weather warms he will be able to go out and about and feel better we hope.

I am keeping quite well I am careful and take no risks. The WDFB birthday was on yesterday Stella and I were there, the President Mrs D Weir sent greetings to all the boys overseas. We didn't wait for the finish as we had to pick up some pullets from the station before it closed. Tom and Bill are busy with the lambs and tractor. I hope Denis you aren't too miserable at your job. I hope Phyllis you are still

praying and hoping that all will be well in a short time. We are doing our bit to the best of our ability. Love from Mum. Heaps of love from all at home.

Followed by another, November 18th 1944.

My dear Denis and Phyllis, I received an airgram from you Phyllis and am so pleased to know you are well and Denis as well as can be expected under the circumstances. Whenever I have a worried feeling about him I ring up the Parish Priest, and ask him to say a Mass for Denis's safety it is a comfort, as our prayers are so small in comparison. I am sorry the weather is so bad for you, it must be terrible for the poor boys, it is good Denis has a room. I follow their movements as I know his Division. Pat [Merchant] came up by car last Monday and had to return on Wednesday re car arrangements. He loves driving a car, he could have travelled by train on free pass, but would rather pay car hire, he had the car hired for a week, gave his Mother the benefit taking her out as She can't go out much now even to Mass without a taxi. Well it is needless to say how pleased we were to see Pat, he is just the same and gave us all the news and had his album. Muriel was just rather far for him to go, she was to have been down that weekend too, but her Mother in Law was not well, so she decided to wait a little longer, however they were both disappointed. Pat had a chat to her on the phone. I asked Pat to leave the three photos of yourself and Sisters for Muriel to see, then I could send them to his Mother to keep for him. Maimie and baby are very well 'Raymond Thomas ' is baby's name. I must write direct to Denis one of these days, you know the reason I always address your letters to Denis, I just can't mention, but you will guess. We are all well T G. Dad is much better. Love and luck to you all, from all at home.

And the third. December 1st 1944.

My dear Denis and Phyllis I was pleased to receive an airgraph from you Phyllis and Denis were well. We listen into the news and Denis's unit has been in pretty bad places, I am sure we must keep on praying and having an occasional Mass said Xmas coming but it does not seem to bring the boys any nearer home. But I am sure Phyllis you will be praying for him, not giving way to grief. Do you know Phyllis when I went to find Denis's address today I could not find it with the other addresses. I really need it to give Stella, she was going into Ranfurly, to send a Xmas cable to his France address. Your letter with the add you sent to me must be still down at Tony's when you write again. I was thinking about seeing the tobacconist here to send some cigarettes, they will send things to the Army Address. When they went to ... however Stella is going to send the Cable to your address as usual. I don't know whether she will get it for the soldiers, there are certain dates that communications close, and the airgraphs were all gone when we got in there during the week. Dear Denis we were supposed to start shearing on Monday but this is Friday and there is a nice growing rain falling which will do good but will delay shearing. We have been held up waiting on shearers and it is now ... work going .. the sheep, there is so much feed and they are getting down bad. I hope Dennis my dear you will make your Christmas as happy as is possible in your circumstances and trust in God for all to be well with you very soon. I hate to think of you being out there but have faith that God will be good to you. Love and best wishes. Greetings from all at home xxxxx

And another two cuttings from a Scandinavian newspaper, one a caricature sketch of the performers, Denis as a debonair young actor

in Brittan's Albert Herring opera, the other a grainy picture from the same opera of Denis and Nancy Evans, both taken during his first tour in the English Opera Group 1949.

Praise for Denis Dowling.

Gramophone record releases for March 1949 include an eight record set of Benjamin Brittan's opera "The Rape of Lucretia". Made under the auspices of the British Council. One of the prominent soloists is the New Zealand baritone, Denis Dowling, who sings the role of Junius, which he played on the Covent Garden stage, Compton Mackenzie's magazine, The Gramophone, singles out his performance for special praise.

This is a good opportunity to bring in the great respect and support for Denis Dowling's professional career, from Ralph Vaughan Williams, noted Composer and Conductor, who several times wrote a note to Denis with his congratulations, and invitations to sing at recitals or festivals.

An example being Dear Denis, We admired your Don so much, indeed you go from strength to strength, Don Pasquale and Cosi were fine, but this tops them all. Yours R V W.

And it was addressed to Lt. Denis Dowling R A. 22/1/53.

We have 9 such examples going back to 1939.

The support of Ralph Vaughan Williams and Lillian Bayliss must have given Denis tremendous strength, to perform at his best.

And we have a covering letter from Arthur Searle to Phyllis 22/1/97.

I am writing this to go with the letters of Vaughan Williams to your Husband when I return them by way of Richard Fisher. By this time I think you will also have heard from Hugh Cobbe, the Music Librarian at the British Library, who in his spare time is working on collecting all of the letters of R V W. that can now be traced. I know he was

glad to see yours, and tells me that he has been able to supply dates for nearly all of them.

They are fascinating letters both from the Vaughan Williams point of view and from your Husbands career. I heard him many times at Sadlers Wells, an important part of my musical upbringing. But I had not realised that he had been the first John of " Sir John in Love ". I confess I also had not realised that he was a New Zealander by birth, too. I see from the programme for the College awards that he was not the only New Zealander there at the time, either- the Cobbett medal went to Douglas Lilburn, now the doyen of New Zealand composers, still alive and pretty well in Wellington, and somebody I have been lucky enough to meet two or three times.

But all this is by the way. My most important reason for writing is that I showed the letters to Ursula Williams a few weeks ago. She was thrilled, and asked me to write [amongst other things she has just had a cataract removed- successfully as it seems so far]. I had been puzzled by the references in two letters to a projected performance of a ballet, but she immediately knew that this would be " The Bridal Day ". She remembers that VW was not satisfied with the BBC performance of the revised version of the work [on television in the early 1950's, and with your husband singing the baritone solo part], and later planned a proper performance, to take place at Hampton Court she thought, and with Dowling once more of course. I'm not sure how accurate all the details from memory will be, I expect Hugh will be able to give more precise dates.

With good wishes, Yours Sincerely,

Arthur Searle.

The British Library. Dear Mrs Dowling.

Some considerable time ago, you very kindly lent my former colleague Arthur Searle letters to your husband from Ralph Vaughan

Williams, so that I could use them in the edition of the composer's letters which I am preparing.

I have now made transcripts of the letters and I know Arthur will be returning the originals to you shortly, if he has not done so. I and Ursula Vaughan Williams are really most grateful for your co-operation in this – it is very good to have the texts in the collection, since clearly VW admired your husband greatly. I enclose copies of my transcripts from which you will see that I think I have managed to date all of them, with one exception about which I had to guess. I would be very glad of any comments you may have.

I do not know what your long term plans are for the letters, but I would just like to mention that we are building up quite a collection of Vaughan Williams letters here at the British Library, partly in the normal course of acquisition but also particularly as a result of my letters project. I hope you don't mind my mentioning this and suggesting that, if you do not have any other plans, you might possibly consider leaving to us eventually.

Again, thank you so much for being so helpful,

Hugh Cobbe.

Ranfurly, 22/9/1937

Dear Tom,

I now take the delightful opportunity of writing you a few lines.

First, I am ashamed of myself for being so neglectful in not writing to you more, especially after your kindness to Denis last year. But Denis's last letter that I received the other day that he wrote from your place put quite a kick in me again, so here I am.

I was so pleased from him how well you were getting on, he has told everything about you and Mrs Brewster and also the family. Your kindness and the good time that you gave him. I am sure that there

are no people in the British Isles that Denis would sooner visit than the Brewster's. He has given an account of everything on your farm, the lovely horses, cows and machinery and the systematical way you have for doing things. He said in his letter that you have not forgotten anyone in Maniototo, and that you knew more people in Maniototo than he did.

There has been a few changes in Maniototo since your days. We have got the telephone and the wireless. We have not got the electric power yet, as you know the places are a bit far apart. Middelmarsh, Hyde, Ranfurly and Naseby are the only places I think in Otago without the power. Ranfurly has grown into quite a nice little town, four stores two of them importers and two Banks. Two large garages, a lovely up to date hotel, a good hospital two Doctors. A Brown from Naseby has a large drapery, all the old houses from your time have been burnt down or else blown away. Now you would like to know of your old Bosses. T. Carmichael still goes out shearing he never seemed to do any good, and poor old Bob Inder is just the very same. He had the misfortune to lose his youngest boy a month ago, so Sony is the only one left for the farms, one of the girls is a Mrs Hore who has a sheep run that runs about 6000 sheep, and the other girl is school teaching. All the farmers in this part of the country are doing alright.

Now just about myself. I had a bad dose of the flu two years ago and very near went out with it. I came down from 14 stone to 10 stone, a big shake up, I have put on weight again 13 stone, so that is not so bad, but I am very stiff with motion. I also fell and burst the cup of my hip and suffer a lot of pain with it but quite healthy. My dear old friend I must conclude.

Hoping yourself and Mrs Brewster and family are all well and doing well. I will post you a few papers, one is a bit out of date but is interesting. By the time you get this note you will be into winter and

we will have the summer, my fingers are very stiff and it is hard to write, so now I remain your old friend.

W G Dowling.

Ranfurly 1937

Dear Mr and Mrs Brewster,

I don't know how to thank you for your hospitality to Denis. I mind the night Mr Brewster stayed with us in Ranfurly before he left, little did we think at the time what the years would bring.

Denis will have given you all the news, although he did not know of Neville Inder's death. Poor Neville had a hard life, when a boy he met with an accident which left him almost stone deaf, so you can imagine working on the farm. Only his poor Mother had any patience with him, and she felt his death very much, he was 33 years of age.

We were very pleased to see the snaps Denis sent last year. What a nice family and Elsie [Elspeth] seems quite grown up, nice for Mrs Brewster to have her help. Mr Willie Davis is always very interested to hear about you, and Earn Smith. My brother Val who spoke very highly of you, is living at Westport, West Coast, working at his trade Cabinet maker, he is very well though had hard luck some years back, lost his Wife and child.

I am always onto Dad to write to you, his letters would be more interesting and he has more time, as I do all the family correspondence. Of course, Denis would have told you how each of the family are placed. I have only Stella the youngest girl and Tom at home. I wish Denis was back, I am just wondering what he intends doing, he was a great man on the farm to, but having that glorious voice and being so musical thought he would give it a trial. It is nice for him if he makes a success of it, but it is a hard life. It is hard to say what is best.

I don't know if you farmers are taxed as the farmers here are, the Labour Government don't know where to stop, it is hard to say how their work will turn out.

Well dear people I must away, with kindest regards to you all and many thanks for your great kindness to Denis. Now that Dad has made a little start he may keep going. One would be pleased to have a line from you anytime.

Yours Sincerely

K. Dowling.

Tom Brewster a young Scotsman, had worked on the Inder Farm, on the White Sow Valley road, but there was also a block of ground facing the Maniototo Station Road, immediately beyond the Dowling ground, behind the "black gate", where he had a hut in the years 1900 to 1903. It is obvious that Tom and W G. were not just neighbours, but good mates, and it is also clear that Tom was accepted into their community. There were many stories about that group, including the one about the suit. One of the group of young men owned a suit, which was borrowed by his mates for "special occasions", such as partnering a young lady to a local dance. There was great hilarity as to how many body shapes that suit fitted, and it really was, first up best dressed.

In 1903 Tom decided he should return to Scotland. He spent his last night with W G and Katie Dowling in their Ranfurly home. His last words to W G. were, "don't worry I'll soon be back," Well, he did not come back but Married a young lady and farmed at the Kirkton Farm Culross, in Fife. They had three children John who farmed Bandirran also in Fife, and Alex who had a dairy farm by Stirling Castle. Elspeth

married James Young who farmed grain and tatties [spuds] by the Edinburgh Airport.

Denis made contact with Tom and his Family when on a singing engagement in Scotland, and remade that connection to the delight of both families. In January 1961 I also made the connection by travelling to John and Nan's family home near Cupar, Fife, and was received as though we had always been family friends. Later in the 1970's John and Nan stayed with Mum and Dad, after having judged the Clydesdale Horse classes at the Royal Sydney Easter Show.

All four of their farms were well established and farmed to a high standard, Tom and his two Sons all breeding Clydesdales, and among them supplying many stallions to Canada and Australia. So, the Brewster Family connection had great significance to our Grandparents and later generations. Tom and Mrs Brewster attended the Wedding of Phyllis and Denis.

Father Martindale Meets Denis Dowling.

New Zealander Sings Priest's Composition.

What a delight to be allowed to do a good turn to a New Zealander in London. And yet by how queer a fluke. !!

I had been asked to make myself known to Mr Denis Dowling when he came to London. I wrote twice to the address I thought I had been given, and was finally answered, charming but firmly, by a Miss Denise Dowling, who avowed that she was neither overseas, nor a Catholic, nor introduced to me. So, I desponded about finding Mr Dowling.

Then a singer who had promised to sing some songs at a concert let me down, the songs were too high. I appealed in despair to the composer of the music, find me someone, and lo! he produced Mr

Denis Dowling, the singing baritone in Our Lady of Victories in Kensington.

What was this concert.? A way of making money for our Probationer's Society, where our Magistrates do all they can to prevent young people going to prison for the first time. The Home Office and St. Vincent de Paul co-operate in looking after probationers. They are visited, jobs are sought for them. Therefore a concert, one way of fleecing the ever docile lambs, by which I mean the lovable laity.

Now I had written some rather sentimental songs for the children belonging to the schools of the Holy Child, in a desperately poor part of London's dockland called Poplar. But we had never had the chance to sing them. Well, thought I, why not sing them at the Probationers concert. Miss Adela Verne played the piano, Miss May Bartlett sang the soprano songs, and Mr Dowling sang the baritone songs and an encore.

His task was difficult. He had to sing "What's O'Clock in Popular." Mr Dowling provided all the due sentiment, without lapsing at all into sentimentalism. You cannot afford to sentimentalise when you are dealing with Popular, or any other docks, but woe betide you if you do not 'feel.'

He had then to sing the story of lads leaving the settlement after prayers, by way of "Cut Throat Lane" with the wind in fruitless trees, with the agony of the river and its stoke holes, the courageous plodding of heavy boots at 4.00 am, and the splendour of Mass a little later. This he did. Mr Dowling had to interpret all this, and he failed us at no point.

Indeed, the next two days he had to reappear at heaven knows what inconvenience to himself, at the two days Cavendish Square Bazaar for Poplar. And in another day or so he is coming with me to Poplar itself.

This is probably the introduction of Denis to the work of St Vincent de Paul, which was commented on by Richard Fisher so favourably, during Denis's Eulogy.

Following the declaration of War with Germany in September 1939, all of Denis's singing engagements were immediately cancelled. Following his graduation from the Officers training programme where he led the Passing Out Parade, he was seconded into the Army's ENSO arm to provide entertainment for troops and civilians.

It was Queen Mary's birthday when she entertained the Troops, that he met the Clutterbuck Sisters, and was smitten by Phyllis. Before their Marriage in 1943 Phyllis completed the pre Marriage instruction course, and became a member of the Catholic Faith. This letter speaks of the admiration here in New Zealand of her courageous achievements.

R D. Ranfurly 8/8/1943

Dear Phyllis,

A small N Z gift which I had to send to you when we heard of your engagement. We feel as if we know you quite well, both from your own and Denis's letters, so please pardon my use of your name so.

We hope all will be well with you and Denis and you will be happily married. I would like to congratulate you on the way you have studied and worked under such difficulties to become a Catholic. You have made Denis's Family very happy and I'm sure will have very special blessings yourselves.

Like you I hope this tiresome War will soon be over, and we will be meeting and welcoming you in New Zealand. You will know who I am, Denis's Sister in Law. I'm sending Best Wishes on Bills behalf to, he most certainly will not be writing, Denis knows him, but we think of you both constantly, and wish you the very best.

Kind regards,

Maimie Dowling.

And so, their Wedding day.

The Wedding Invitations were sent out from Phyllis Parents,

Mr and Mrs Edward Clutterbuck

Request the pleasure of the company of -----

At the marriage of their daughter

Phyllis with 2nd Lieutenant Denis Dowling

At the Shrine of Our Lady of Willesden, Nicol Road,

On Saturday, September 11th 1943, at 2 pm.,

And afterwards at Ye Olde Trough, Kilburn Lane.

142 Doyle Gardens

Harlesden N W. 10.

And we have the Congratulatory Card from the McCarthy Family,
Hawea Flat, upon their Wedding.

As stated earlier the Wedding Ceremony had 38 guests including Tom and Mrs Brewster, as well as fellow students of Denis. It is not known how Denis arranged for his Cousin, Able Seaman Pat Merchant of Dunedin, to be his Best Man, but obviously his ship, maybe the Achilles on which he later served, was in port.

We do not have information telling us when Denis was called up, but as he landed in France with the D Day landings, 6 June 1944 he would have joined his Unit at an earlier time. We would imagine that between their Wedding and his call up date, that they would still have entertainment obligations to ENSA. We do have one small postcard, used to communicate with your fighting soldier, of a small

size I had not seen before, written by his Mother dated October 14th 1944.

We do have Denis's Leave Pass, when he was granted Compassionate leave to return to New Zealand, it was dated 19/7/45, and he would have been still in Germany. His pass was valid provided he returned to Britain from leave by 27/12/45.

We do know that the British and other Army Commanders ,were in charge of Law and Order duties for different sections of occupied Germany. The first request for leave to return to New Zealand on compassionate leave, was refused, as insufficient personnel had arrived for Peace Keeping duties. His Pass as an Officer, allowed him free rail travel to London, where he spent one night with Phyllis, then to Southampton I believe, for his journey through the Panama Cannel and home to Wellington. Each way would be a four week sailing.

I can clearly recall the arrival at our house of Denis. Upon arrival at Wellington and meeting Pat Merchant at the wharf, where Denis was informed of his Mother's death about 10 days before, Denis caught the Wellington to Lyttelton ferry, and then troop train to Palmerston overnight. Tom and Stella picked up Dad and drove to Palmerston. During the early hours the train arrived, and up the Pigroot to our house. It was daybreak and Mum was rushing around, getting the coal range going to boil the kettle. Denis tried the front door and it was still locked. In his cultured voice he called out," Open up Maimie, Denis here, were home." I was 10, and while the real significance of his safe arrival was there for all to see, I knew that following radio news broadcasts during the War years, the safe arrival home was a huge relief for all the adults.

Denis enjoyed two to three months just being home again in peaceful Maniototo and Dunedin. He was booked to sing in Dunedin, but because of his serious throat infection, he could not oblige. He

did attend a 'Victory over Japan' troop celebration, [VJ Day was 14/8/1945], as we have an invitation card, signed by several returned soldiers.

The first visit to see Denis and Phyllis in London, were his Brother Tony and Kathleen Dowling from Dunedin, during the 1950,s, when they toured through Ireland to meet old Family Relations, and absorb the history of our original Dowling Immigrants.

Mrs Catherine Dowling of Ranfurly. New Zealand Tablet.

The death occurred recently at Ranfurly of Mrs Catherine Dowling at the age of 73 years. The late Mrs Dowling was born at Naseby, the second daughter of the late Mr and Mrs O'Connell, pioneer residents of the district. After her education at the Naseby Catholic school she early interested herself in parish work, acting as church organist, until her departure from Naseby for her marriage with the late Mr William Dowling of Pine Terrace , Ranfurly.

Despite the demands of a young family, and the inconveniences of pioneer farming, Mrs Dowling acted as organist for the Church of the Sacred Heart , Ranfurly, for a period of 30 years. It was a source of satisfaction to her that after her retirement from the choir her youngest son Denis prior to his departure for England, acted as conductor for some years, he being succeeded by her second son William, who still acts in this capacity.

Mrs Dowling was also interested in various other church activities, being President of the Alter Society for many years as well as the local promoter of the Far East Missionary publication. She also actively participated in local secular activities.

Mrs Dowling was predeceased by her husband earlier in the year, and she is survived by a family of two daughters, and four sons, namely Mrs N McCarthy Hawea Flat, Miss Stella Dowling Ranfurly, Messers A J Dowling Dunedin, William and Thomas Dowling Ranfurly,

and Lieut. Denis Dowling London,[at present on leave in New Zealand].

Father W A Quinn Dunedin Nephew, assisted by Father C E Tylee Ranfurly, celebrated Requiem Mass at the Sacred Heart Church Ranfurly.

Denis was home on leave, but as previously stated he missed his Mother's welcome, by a few days.

N Z Singer Home, Lieut. Denis Dowling On Leave, the noted New Zealand singer returned yesterday, arriving at Wellington by the ship which brought home a draft of former prisoners of war. He is an officer in the British Army in Germany and has obtained compassionate leave to visit his home at Ranfurly, Otago.

Lieutenant Dowling landed with his unit the 11th Armoured Division on the Continent two or three days after D Day. His division, after fighting through Normandy, northern France and Holland , and capturing the port of Antwerp intact, ended up in Lubec, Germany, where Admiral Doenitz, Lord Haw Haw, and other Germans prominent at the time were captured. One of the Divisions batteries released the Prisoner's of Belsen concentration camp. "You have read about that in the papers, it has not been exaggerated, I can tell you," he said. People were dying around our feet at the rate of 400 a day.

Lieutenant Dowling will be in New Zealand for 28 days. [I think longer].

Some Ranfurly Notes, 1945. Rugby Football.

The first matches for the Lory Cup will be played at Naseby on Saturday. This Cup was presented by Mr William Lory of Dunedin, in memory of Sargent William Lory, who was killed overseas and was formerly a member of the Naseby Club. The cup is for competition

between clubs playing in the Maniototo Sub -union, and next Saturday's games will be the first to be played for this trophy.

Returned Servicemen honoured.

Although several other similar functions were held in the district last week, there was an excellent attendance at a welcome social in the Ranfurly Hall on Thursday night of last week. The guests were Lieutenant- colonel J W Costello, Lieutenant E Woods, Lieutenant Denis Dowling, Lance – corporal R Wier, Private R Hewitt [a repatriated prisoner of war, and Telegraphist D Graham [navy].

The Chairman J I Fraser extended a warm welcome to all the men on behalf of the residents, and made reference to the service rendered by each. He made especial reference to Private Hewitt, who had been a prisoner of war in Germany for four years, after being captured in Greece.

Extending a welcome to Lieutenant Dowling the well known singer, Mr Fraser said they were delighted to honour him, not only as an officer of the British Army, but also as a former resident of the district, who had left New Zealand 10 years ago to continue his career in England. He concluded by congratulating Mr Dowling on his service to the Empire and also the success he had met with as a singer. Mr Fraser expressed the wish that when Mr Dowling returned to England he would be released from the army and continue his career , which would be closely followed by all his friends at home.

All the servicemen returned thanks for the warm welcome they had received. In his reply Lieutenant Dowling said that he felt it was his duty not only to thank the residents for the welcome, but also to take the opportunity of expressing his appreciation to them for their support and assistance 10 years ago, when all had made it possible for him to go to England to begin his studies. He regreted that owing to throat trouble he could not sing that night, but if he could he would give a concert in Ranfurly, before he returned to England.

Some interesting notes on the Sadlers Wells Opera Theatre.

In 1683 Mr Sadler bought a building at Islington, then a small country village well outside London. Mr Sadler was a highways surveyor, and by chance his workmen found a well with sparking water, which had been known about much earlier. In fact, the well had been lined with stones and a large stone protected the water below. He believed this water had healing qualities, so advertised that People should come from London and partake of this medicinal water. There were other such claims made for water and its healing property's, at other sites around the country. A physician who analysed the water stated he could make beer with this water. He immediately built a single story "Musick House ", which stood well into the 18th century.

There is no doubt Sadler enjoyed huge success, about 600 people would journey out each day from London, listen to his music, drink the water at 6 pence per glass, and enjoy his spacious gardens. Because only the wealthier people could travel and enjoy this experience, horse patrols had to ride the road linking back to London to protect the travellers from robbers. The other nearby spas conducted a smear campaign, and his business was destroyed in just a few years.

Other proprietors bought and used this property for several other musical ventures. In 1765 the old building was replaced in just 7 weeks and regular theatrical productions were held. During the 18th century it became fashionable to travel to the entertainment provided, and at one time Joseph Grimaldi, the first clown to use the real clowns makeup, white with red cheeks, ran the theatre.

At a later period, it was known as the Aquatic Theatre, as water from the nearby New River was piped into a tank and battles staged in the tank were performed, the first being "The Siege of Gibraltar ", followed by "The Battle of the Nile ". Using model warships, with the

ships firing broadsides at each other, the loser boat sinking, apparently very popular.

In 1844 an actor of considerable reputation, Samuel Phelps took over and started producing Macbeth, followed by nearly all of Shakespeare's plays. He set a new standard of production and stage management, along with well trained actors, who were proud to declare they played at the Wells. Upon the retirement of Phelps, the standard fell away, and the building was a skating rink, a boxing hall and exhibition hall.

Other enterprising people tried to resurrect the building as a theatre, but without long term success, and in 1915 it was closed down.

Enter Lillian Bayliss, niece of Emma Cons who ran the "Old Vic " from 1880 to 1923 when Lillian Bayliss took over, producing opera and drama on two nights of each week. She employed student singers and a very low cost operation, so that all residents of London could afford to see the productions. In addition she set up the " Old Vic Association " to raise funds for the theatre.

Lillian Bayliss, following 6 years of fund raising bought and refurbished the vacant Saddlers Wells building, and reopened this theatre on Rosebury Avenue, north Thames. Plays were staged there as well as opera, but eventually the Old Vic staged drama productions, Saddlers Wells opera. Lillian Bayliss died in 1937, and the original well discovered by Saddler, is still there under the first row of seats.

During the War, both theatres suffered from lack of patronage, the Wells building housing people from bombed out homes. The new Ballet Company became firmly established at Saddlers Wells.

1956, Saddlers Wells celebrates 25 years as the " Opera House for the People."

This year Sadlers Wells celebrates its quarter century as London's second opera house – second in name only, for each year it gives more than 200 performances of opera – more than Covent Garden, which alternates opera with ballet seasons. The important thing to remember about Sadlers Wells, is that it is not Covent Garden. That may seem obvious, but from the comparisons one so often hears made it is a necessary reminder. What we can do at the Wells, is dictated by the size and resources of the house. Sometimes we do stage the same operas, bread and butter operas, which are the foundation of the repertoire of any house.

Covent Garden is of right, the national opera house, one of the great opera houses of the world. Sadlers Wells on the other hand, has different aims. To give the public opera of the best quality possible, sung in English, at reasonable prices.

The Cost of Opera.

Last year 1955, it cost some 300,000 pounds to keep Sadlers Wells going. 200,000 pounds the theatre earned for itself, in box office takings. The other 100,000 pounds to cover the inevitable difference between costs and takings, came as an Arts Council Grant.

Apart from the comparatively small cost of administration and the expenditure of mounting new works, most of the money goes in salaries, to between 25 and 30 principal singers, a permanent chorus of 48, and an orchestra of 56, a ballet of 36, and the necessary stage hands and technicians.

These are the people responsible for nearly 200 performances of opera in each year spread over some 11 months, about 32 weeks in London, roughly 10 weeks spent in touring the provinces. In fact ,Sadlers Wells gives more performances of opera in a year than does Covent Garden where the ballet occupies a large part of the year.

Only in English.

There is no opera in other languages at Saddlers Wells, it is in English the year round. Our policy is to encourage opera in the vernacular, and to use British singers, from Britain and the Commonwealth. We want to encourage contemporary works, as well as staging the usual repertoire and bring into it operas that have been long neglected or forgotten. Next year we hope to give our audiences some more works which are often heard on the Continent but have not been performed here for many years.

In fact, Saddlers Wells has actually commissioned an opera with music by John Gardener to a libretto by Pat Terry, Covent Garden opera manager, based on the Somerset Maugham story, "The Moon and Sixpence."

No Rivalry.

There is no rivalry between London's two opera houses. They have an informal relationship that allows for consultation on dates, so that as far as possible they will not find themselves performing the same opera on the same night.

There is also a certain amount of traffic between them with singers, Wells singers sometimes appear at the Garden, Royal Opera House artists come to the Wells. Amy Shuard sang at Covent Garden while still in the Wells Company, and after 'translation' to Bow Street, has returned to Islington to sing in the "Consul". James Johnson originally a Saddlers Wells singer, has returned for some roles. Only recently during the Covent Garden provincial tour in March, Joan Stuart went at short notice from the Wells to sing Micaela in Carmen and the Countess in the Marriage of Figaro in tour performances.

Saddlers Wells Theatre is vested in the Saddlers Wells Foundation, of which Queen Elizabeth is patron. The day to day administration is in the hands of Norman Tucker, a rare combination of musician and

administrator. He and his advisors on the Trust decide, according to what can be afforded, on the repertoire for that season. They decide too on new productions, planning in advance.

One of the great difficulties lies in finding good English translations of the opera we want to do, a problem that does not exist for Continental opera houses which have large repertoires of their own operas in their own languages.

Building Tradition.

We are also up against the problem of tradition, with artists and audiences. There has been no native tradition of opera in this Country, it is in fact not a natural thing with us, although miracles have been achieved. For until 1931 there was no permanent opera in London, and since the War we now have two houses both nearly always filled.

With nearly 40 operas in their repertoire, it combines the best of the foreign operas with English works which might otherwise never have had performances today. It is proud that it gave the first incentive to English opera after the War, with the World Premiere in 1945 of Britten's "Peter Grimes", an opera now in the standard repertoire of almost every opera house in the world.

Place of light Opera.

But the standard operas are not enough to satisfy the Wells. It wants as soon as it can, to introduce lighter operas and operettas. We are going to do "The Merry Widow" as soon as we can. Not only that, we should stage such things as the Gilbert and Sullivan operas when they are available, following the copyright expiry held by the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company.

We have the Contracts signed by Denis, dating from 20/10/47 through to 23/2/52, for invitations to perform Opera for the English Opera Group, back at Saddlers Wells, or personal invitations to sing

at Recitals, or take part in musical Festivals, around England. There are 34 such Contracts, and as they cease on the 23/2/1952, I presume that at that time, Denis was invited to join Saddlers Wells as a Principal Baritone. He was frequently engaged by the BBC to contribute solos, or studio productions from their studios, so in reality Denis Dowling was busy.

We have also a neat tabulation of Denis Dowling's first 200 Operatic performances, contributed by an admirer, Miss A Wigley, of Effingham Place, Hornsey N8, on December 10th 1955.

In this book She has written,

'I do hope you will accept this little souvenir. Your performances always give me such pleasure and recently you seem to have had so much more confidence and assurance. With all the best wishes for Don Giovanni.'

In this book she has listed each performance from his very first as the 1st Shepherd in "Delectable Mountains" by Ralph Vaughan Williams, on 1/7/1936, as a first year student. This was followed by Shepherd Fennel in "The Three Strangers" on 8/7/1936, all before he performed as Mr Ford in what was previously termed his first performance on 3/7/1937.

To achieve those first 200 performances Denis had learned 33 roles, in 33 different operas, and as he cemented his place within the hierarchy of the singers, he performed from 7 times per season through to up to 30 times per season, over those 9 years. Later Denis learned and performed more than one role in the larger operas, where he won rave reviews, a testament to his versatile acting ability.

But as operas were performed more frequently over subsequent decades, we know that Denis was performing opera for Saddlers

Wells about 70 performances per season. This included the various Tours the Company made on the Continent, or through Britain.

We also have 5 copies of referrals from The Saddlers Wells Director to Denis, of Singers whom Management wished to be trained in singing technique and voice production by Denis, following his appointment as 'Singing Consultant' for the Company, the first dated 8/4/1976. At that time Denis was working with 5 Principals each week.

Though this Letter of Appreciation is dated 20/12/1996, it is appropriate to include it here.

Dear Mrs Dowling.

Only recently I received the sad news that Denis had passed away, and I wanted to send you my sincerest condolences.

I have such fond memories of him as a warm person and such a terrific teacher.

It is about 15 years ago that I left London to pursue my career in Austria and Germany, and the last time I saw Denis must have been when you came for dinner when I still lived in Montagu Square.

In all those years I hardly ever returned, the last time was over 5 years ago, and I had a nice talk with Denis. He was so supportive, and helpful as a teacher, in fact, he was the last teacher I ever had, since I have not had a singing lesson since I left London. And I am still singing, sing, as Denis would tell me, with the voice that God gave me. That was the best advice I ever had. He taught me how to use my own voice, limitations and all, and not try and be someone else.

How I would love to study with him now, now that I have sung in Vienna, in Salzburg, Berlin, Frankfurt, Leipzig, Dresden – heavy stuff like Wozzeck and Moses. Coming up is Bartok's Bluebeard.

It must be a terrible loss for you, and I want to wish you all the best possible.

Please accept my warmest wishes for a happy and healthy 1997.

With kind regards,

Matteo de Monti. [Franz – Josefstrasse 25B, Salzburg.]

This contribution was written by Owen Brannigan, Principal Base singer for Saddlers Wells, and good friend of Denis. There are many photographs of them together on stage.

Reflections of an opera singer. Taken from Crescendo, 1954.

The first singer I remember hearing was a Mr Toomy Tucker, whose admirable success in singing for his supper is known to most of us and indeed, no mean achievement. How he would have fared so every day throughout the year is another matter, and one which brings me at once away from a frivolous beginning to the serious fact, that to sing daily and maintain consistent performances is not so easy as it looks, to say the least. It would be wrong of course if it didn't sound and appear so, but the attainment of such impressions are only gained by intense training, perseverance and practice, sometimes not realised by the listener.

Because, the gift of a wonderful voice matters little if the knowledge and art of using it, and keeping it, is ignored. In this respect the task of the English Singer is far from lightened when one considers what is expected of him in terms of versatility and contradictory styles, most necessary to adopt, if a successful career is to be made under conditions here. Much as we would like to, we can't specialise. Prouder the boast of course, if despite theories to the contrary, we succeed, and more than once have I witnessed my Continental colleagues during my Glyndebourne and Festival performances show amazement, to think that one day I would take part in Italian or

German Opera and the next day I would switch to the Messiah in Yorkshire, a 'Miscellaneous Concert' in Wales, the B Minor Mass in Bath, or Judas Maccabeus in Newcastle.

Here's a true story concerning the latter performance. My photograph on display for my part in a local performance of this, caused comment from two miners going like this. "Geordie, he doesn't look like a foreigner, does he", the other replying, "No, but he must be of course with a name like "Judas Maccabeus". Yes, anything must be coped with from Oratorio to Folk Songs, Sullivan to Benjamin Britten, names reminding us at once of two important words, English Opera.

The furtherance of Opera in England has found many of us singing and enjoying the gradual acclimation of Operas, that only a few years ago would have seemed out of the question in this Country. My own contribution to this alone adds up to some 30 odd roles of all shapes and sizes, a literal description indeed if one considers what is given to the Bass in opera. Poor soul.! Hardly if ever romantic, anything from a Holy Monk to the very Devil himself, so often the funny man, nearly always old and usually well padded [even may I add, if he has no need of it]. This varied character disguise requires much patience and time to develop, and of course it is bound to create amusing incidents.

A recent one concerns myself as old snuffy Dr Bartolo in the Marriage of Figaro. An old lady admirer, no doubt short sighted and obviously hard of hearing, complimented me on my performance and make up as the debonair " Figaro" saying she liked everyone in fact except " the old horror" who played " Dr Bartolo ", the poor Bass again.! Many of you will know quite a lot about these odd characters in Opera by now, others will be meeting them in a more conventual way for the first time at the Annual Operatic Concert provided by Sir Robert Mayer, when we hope you will be tempted by the taste he gives you to come and see us looking and singing either

grave or gay, high or low, in title roles or minor parts, but always in the cause of Opera in England.

We have Denis Dowling scrap book where newspaper accounts of Denis's early performances in Dunedin and early years in London, and though similar to what has been recorded, there are some that add to our knowledge.

This clipping is from "Les Cloches De Corneville 1933.

The performance on Saturday night was remarkable for its brightness, its vitality and its directness. Its qualities good or bad, are such as can be judged by anyone, and it cannot be denied that the good qualities are very good, while those that are not so good are far from being bad. They are all small cavils and it would be difficult to bring a really serious charge against the production. Mr Denis Dowling introduced himself to the Dunedin public most effectively in the role of the Marquis, and he is to be warmly congratulated on the merit of his theatrical debut. Blessed with a baritone voice of rich, warm quality, half his battle was won before he began, and the quiet competency of his stage work simply completed a most attractive characterisation.

And another comment.

Mr Dowling quickly won all hearts with his delightful rendering of "With Joy in my Heart", and his duets with Miss Burt were enthusiastically received. Whether in recitative or in concert the rich quality of his voice never varied. His acting in the role of the Marquis must have been a surprise to many who knew him only as a singer of quality.

And the Choral Society Performance of "Israel in Egypt."

Mr. Dowling's rich resonant Bass was given admirable expression in the two solos allotted to him, "He Layeth the Beams of his Chambers", which was quite the most outstanding solo of the

evening, and “ Wave from Wave Congealed with Wonder”, both airs being sung with arresting depth of artistic interpretation.

And so to “ The Messiah”.

Mr Dowling has a fine robust voice, under excellent control. His enunciation was excellent, and he evidently makes a careful and intelligent study of the numbers he has to sing. The audience was particularly pleased with his rendition of the well known “ The Trumpet shall Sound”. In fact ,Mr Dowling handled all his work correctly, and as already stated with praiseworthy insight. Possessing a voice of beautiful quality, wide in range and smoothly produced, he has also the gift of imagination and the capacity to make his songs alive.

And another Performance.

Mr Dowling created an instant impression. The rich tone and power of his opening notes in “Eri Tu “ from Verdi’s “ Un Ballo in Maschera” made it realised that here was a singer of no ordinary quality. Admiration increased with the dramatic strength he brought to the great aria, and his masterly control of the difficult phrasing of the English text.

There is considerable coverage of his meritorious win in Melbourne of his success in winning the Sun Centenary Aria Competition, including photographs of himself and the Aria Judges Mr Alfred Hill and Dame Florence Austral, and it can be noted that everybody is very cheerful, because Denis Dowling was a rank outsider among mature students. Denis must have been so proud to come through the Ballarat sessions, sing in Melbourne, and win so convincingly.

On one scoresheet, he dropped only 5 points singing his Prologue, and 18 points singing Eri Tu, allowing a combined winning margin of 23 points. A stunning night for the ‘Singing Farmer’.

There are over 50 programmes and articles of Festival , Solo invitations, and Choir performances, many of them annual events, where Denis Dowling is given prominent mention, so it could be true to say, that along with BBC singing engagements he was busy. And in addition, his responsibility to the Wells Company, of learning new operatic roles, practises and performances, Denis and Phyllis were a busy pair.

And we have many promotional photographs taken during performance as advertising of the many operas Denis performed in, unfortunately many do not identify the opera being promoted, but as always Denis was pleased to help promote opera.

Denis Dowling Benefit. 1934

Notable Concert in Town Hall.

The entertainment arranged by the musical societies and prominent musicians in Dunedin for the purpose of assisting Mr Denis Dowling, the talented young Otago baritone, to proceed to Europe to further his studies in vocal art, was attended by a large audience in the Town Hall on Saturday evening, when an unusually well balanced and attractively varied programme was presented. The readiness with which the various musical organisations came forward with assistance was in itself a high tribute to Mr Dowling's personal worth as well as his artistic qualifications, and the reception accorded the singer by the audience, left no doubt as to his popularity with music lovers in this city.

Dunedinite in Wales, The spot where the Winning Try was scored.

Rugby may be a religion with New Zealanders, but deep down in the hearts of every Welshman is an image symbolical of the same game which is devoutly worshiped. So much was revealed to a Dunedin

singer, Denis Dowling, when he visited Wales during a professional tour quite recently. Mr Dowling was the guest of Mr Ivor Owen, of Swansea, one of the leaders of the musical world in the principality, and it transpired that the host was the brother of Dick Owen who played half back for Wales against the 1905 All Blacks. It need hardly be said that rugby entered largely into the conversation.

The New Zealand visitor, indeed was reminded that Swansea beat the last All Blacks, and further, he was taken to the ground which was the scene of the victory and shown the exact spot where Ted Morgan scored the winning try. Mr Dowling found that the Welshmen he conversed with knew far more about New Zealand football and footballers than he did.

Some snippets of information.

1940. The Leith Hill Musical Festival of massed Choirs, conducted by Ralph Vaughan Williams, was composed of up to 1000 singers of all ages. Denis was invited in those early years of his profession as guest Soloist. These Festivals had been running annually for over 30 years.

Wessex Philharmonic Orchestra's Concert.

Accomplished New Zealander.

The guest artist was Mr Denis Dowling a New Zealander, who has studied to some purpose at the Royal College.

The gift of a fine voice is a very arbitrary affair. And is often bestowed on people with no musical sensibility whatever, and the result can be desolating. Mr Dowling is both singer and musician. He sang a group of English songs by Vaughan Williams, Parry and Rodger Quilter, and a typical Rossini aria. One felt they were not selected merely to show off a fine voice. They were admirably sung and gave the greatest pleasure.

Centenary Performance by Massed Choirs.

Appropriately, in the centenary year of Mendelssohn's death, the choirs of four town Musical Societies sang "Elijah ". Among the guest Artists was Denis Dowling, who sung the name part Elijah, had all the sober virtues that Mendelssohn required, firm tone, good articulation and responsiveness.

The Magic Flute. New Production at Saddlers Wells.

This music critic was not impressed.

After caustic comments about stage décor and casting of roles, he concludes,' but this reads like the sort of review one might write about a good student performance. Only Denis Dowling and Marion Studholme, as the Bird Man and his Wife, made one think that this was a professional engagement at London's second opera house. And his performance was a triumph over miscasting.'

In another critic's report of The Magic Flute, he notes that Owen Brannigan sang a strong and dignified "Sarastro ", his lower register was especially rich.

About 1938, at a reception in London for the Duchess of Kent, all entertainment was provided by New Zealand Troops and including the haka. Among the artists was Hinemoa Rosieur who came second to Denis in the 1934 Sun Aria Competition, Denis also being present.

Denis Dowling 1947. The English Opera Group finished its very successful Benjamin Britten season at Covent Garden on October 20th , with the reputation of the young Dunedin baritone Denis Dowling surely established. He joined the Group at the beginning of the season and toured with the full Company. Following War service, between broadcasts and concerts he fitted in 9 months strenuous training, so he fully deserves the success his fine singing has brought him.

This same Opera Group fully considered touring to Australia and New Zealand in 1948/49 but because there was no Government invitation

this plan fell through. If this fledgling Company had been able to tour, Denis would have had his opportunity to perform before the New Zealand Public, and remove the main impediment that haunted his long career.

And one last review of performances including Denis Dowling from the 1959 season of Saddlers Wells productions, was the meteoric rise of Patricia Kern of Swansea, Wales, as a Principal of the Company. Patricia had four young children I believe, so she had other responsibilities in her early 20s, but when playing the part of Cinderella, in Rossini's "La Cenerentola " as a 30 year old, she wowed the Audiences and the Critics.

One report reads,

Cinderella arrived ahead of season last night, but she did so in a blaze of splendour. The production, its first time at Saddlers Wells, was a personal triumph for a new singing star, and a collective success for the company. In the title part Patricia Kern is nothing less than sensational.

Here is a singer, unknown to London, able to bring off a role which only the young Spanish star Teresa Berganza and maybe one other in the world can manage successfully.

This is because Rossini wrote it for an unusual voice, a florid mezzo of wide range, which has to tackle runs and scales and hit top and bottom notes in quick succession.

Miss Berganza and Anna Maria Rota of Italy starred in the part at Glyndebourne last summer. Miss Kern has put herself straight into their class.

Behind her was a company which had been well schooled in the glittering elaborate style of the opera.

Attractively produced by Douglas Craig with splendid fairy tale décor by Carl Toms, the opera is a spectacle as rewarding to see, as it is to hear. What an introduction.!

Among the other singers Howell Glynne as the blustering step father, and Denis Dowling as Dandini, were comically entertaining yet securely in style.

Another describing the same opera wrote,

The performance went with an exhilarating swing. Most importantly, it divulged a Cinderella of considerable note. Patricia Kern has not only the elegiac, resigned voice to portray Cinderella in distress, but the authority, control and ringing tone to convey most impressively, Cinderella triumphantly risen from the ashes.

This was an impersonation of outstanding musical cultivation, of a quality and fine finish that one rarely encounters at the Wells. Miss Kern on her showing in this work, is among the most striking and promising of our operatic singers.

Two other Operas are reviewed, *Così fan tutte* and *Figaro* both of which Denis played many times.

And so, we build toward the climax of his long career. Denis had been appointed the Company Musical Consultant in 1976, even though he was still a regular member of the cast, yet he valued and carried out this new role with his professional vigour. In this new role, you could say Denis was a full time employee, because not only was he present at interviews for new singers, he was requested by Management to provide further technical training to individual prominent cast members, and he was instrumental in providing his standard of stage singing and acting during their performance.

What a transition, from the “Singing Farmer “ of Maniototo, to setting your standard of professional performance for Opera, on the stages of the world.

It is stated that Denis chose his last Operatic role, in Sergei Prokofiev's, War and Peace, where he played the Character role of Prince Nikolai Bolkonsky, a small role where the entire time on stage is measured in minutes, so the Character impersonation must be immediate and memorable.

War and Peace represents the struggle in Moscow in the period 1809 to 1812, when Armies from 12 European lands invaded Moscow, but was first performed in the 1930s. It is a large production and is shown through 13 scenes, so is a very active performance. In this Opera Denis plays his part in scene 3, as Father of the Hero, Prince Andrei Bolkonsky.

This Opera was first performed by Saddlers Wells in 1972, and was one of the four operas performed during the Company's first tour of America in 1984. Operas were performed in Houston, Austin, and San Antonio, Texas, and New Orleans and lastly New York. So, Denis Dowling played his final role for the Company on June 29th 1984, where, as recounted in the memory written by Michael Dowling, the Company Management and Principals enjoyed a wonderful retirement celebration.

A fitting end to a life of operatic entertainment.

During Denis's retirement years he did teach special students, and he sang his last BBC recital in a duet with John Brecknoff, when aged 80 years.

