

Alma Woods MBE

d. October 24 2005.



In 1952 Alma and Fred Woods arrived from London with two young children, daughter Judy and son Michael. Four days after disembarking from the *Captain Cook*, she had joined the *Eden Players*. Born in the United Kingdom, Alma was already a recognised actress of some note having played *Sylvia Pankhurst's Life Story* before the PM, Cabinet Ministers and the late Sylvia Pankhurst. She had toured home-town London doing concert party items and appeared in a few minor productions. As a little girl Alma used to pray, 'Please, dear God, let me do the splits so I can go on the stage. Her older sister, whom she idolised, was also in professional theatre.

Mechanic Fred survived Dunkirk in WW2, chauffeured the Queen when she was a princess and revitalised the *Howick Athletic Club*. Alma claims that she fell in love with him when she was 14. Fred didn't like her travelling to Mt Eden to perform so, in 1954, Alma placed a small advertisement in the *Howick Post*, which led to 18 people forming the *Howick Little Theatre Group*. Initially she taught acting skills on Saturday mornings and the group performed one-act plays and pantomimes in the village's *Town Hall* until about 1964 when it was demolished to make way for a supermarket. Plays and musicals were then performed in various venues around the area, including the *RSA*, *Monterey Theatre* and a number of school halls.



Alma wrote *Howick Little Theatre's* first play, *Have Not Charity*, in 1957. She followed it with *Setting the Day* (1958) and *Step in the Hollow* (1964), which won a *British Drama League Award*. By 1970 a purpose-built theatre in *Lloyd Elsmore Park*, next to the netball courts, was being negotiated with the *Manukau City Council*. It opened on July 28 1974. In 1982 the building size was doubled and a bar was added in 1985. She co-produced the 1971 *Auckland Centennial Command Concert* at *The St. James Theatre* in front of Princess Alexandra and the Governor General Sir Arthur Porritt. This is probably the *VAC's* finest hour.

Alma appeared in about 50 plays with Auckland's professional *Mercury Theatre* and a number of television commercials. There were also one-women shows and many television appearances including voicing puppet dog *Nowcy* and *Willie McNab*, the wee Scottish mouse, for TV's *Chicaboom* and *Chic Chat* with Chic Littlewood. In the 60s she acted in two movies for *Pacific Films* and later in tele-films *Hanlon: In Search of Minnie Deans* and *Mother Tongue*. For at least 20 years she recorded talking books for the *Blind Institute*.

She was a resident performer in Kevin Moore's television show, *Music Hall* and often filled in for the *Star Hotel's Music Hall*. Alma was awarded an MBE for services to theatre in 1978. She won the *British Drama League Festival Best Actress Award* three times. The *Variety Artists Club of New Zealand* presented her with a *Scroll of Honour* in 1973 and the 26th *Benny Award* in 1988.

