



BLUE RIBBONS  
TO  
BALACLAVAS

---

THE RED CROSS DIVISION COMPETITION  
AT THE ROYAL MELBOURNE SHOW

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# INTRODUCTION

In 1916 Women's Industries (now known as Art, Craft & Cookery) introduced the Red Cross Division competition within the traditional needlework and cookery competition. Following the guidelines stipulated, women competed by creating items from the Red Cross Booklet. From knitted balaclavas and Dutch heeled socks to mittens and a 'novelty for the prevention of frostbite', women industriously submitted entries.

As a report of the 1916 Show noted: 'Entries in all sections are considerably fewer than at previous shows, ... fancy work ... has been abandoned until peace returns once more.'

(Leader 30/9/1916)

**'IF ANYONE NEEDED TO BE CONVINCED THAT WOMEN HAVE BEEN OBSESSED BY WAR WORK TO THE EXCLUSION OF ALL OTHER VOCATIONS, THE SHOW WOULD DRIVE THE CONVICTION HOME UNMISTAKABLY.'**

(LEADER 30/9/1916)

The introduction of a 'comforts' section mirrored the mobilisation of a nation at war. Women turned from creating fancy work to channeling their time and talents into the production of much needed utilitarian articles or comforts.

Comforts were so called non essential or 'comfort' items that were not supplied by the services to Australian troops overseas. Today we may consider such items to be essential but in 1916 these included among other things, clothing such as singlets, socks, pyjamas; cigarettes and tobacco, razor blades, soap, toothbrushes, food and reading material. Comforts were provided free of charge to supplement army rations and soldiers' personal kits.



1.

The supply of comforts to soldiers at the front was a massive undertaking, which involved the production of goods, their collection in central depots, dispatch and shipping overseas followed by distribution to the troops at the frontline.

This industry was serviced by voluntary labour through networks of community branches that made, sourced and fundraised at the local level then forwarded their efforts to a central agency such as the Red Cross or the Australian Comforts Fund (ACF).

Described as 'emotional labor' by historians Claire Williams and Bill Thorpe (*Beyond Industrial Sociology: The Work of Men and Women*, Allen & Unwin, 1992) this voluntary work was predominantly undertaken by women. The provision of comforts was an essential war service and it served a deep emotional need by enabling those at home to be involved and make a tangible difference to the lives and welfare of their sons/husbands/fathers/brothers and sweethearts at the front.



2.

As a 'Lady Correspondent', and beginner knitter, noted in her column: 'What our women are doing in a quiet, unassuming way can never be recorded. There are many who would gladly go to the front if they could ...and so few are privileged to nurse. So the difficult and tiresome task of waiting is made less weary by doing something for the boys.' (Winner, 16/6/1915, p. 9)

Across the nation, women were galvanized into action producing items for the troops and a Red Cross Section was similarly included in the 1916 competition at the Queensland Annual Show.

The Red Cross Division remained a patriotic subset of the Women's Industries competition at the Royal Melbourne Show for three years from 1916 to 1918 and attracted steady interest.



# THE RED CROSS

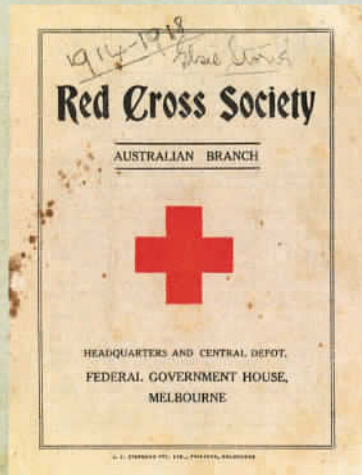
The Australian Red Cross was founded by Lady Helen Munro Ferguson, wife of the Governor General of Australia and she was the national President from August 1914 until her return to Britain in 1920. Lady Ferguson ran the national headquarters from her home Government House, Melbourne with the hub of operations, the Red Cross central depot, sited in the ballroom.



3.

To 'give everyone a chance of learning what style of contribution is most needed' the 'Red Cross Committee at Federal Government House' prepared a 'comprehensive little booklet' ... 'copies of [which] may be obtained in numbers by the secretaries of the branches throughout the State...' (Argus, 10/4/1915 p 9) The Red Cross Booklet contained scale diagrams of fabric garments and full directions for knitted socks, caps, scarves and other comforts.

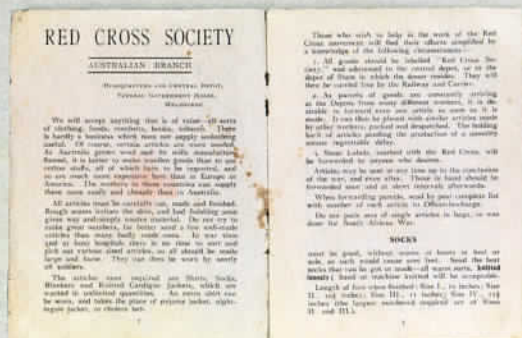
Over the duration of World War I, the Red Cross dispatched a total of 395,695 food parcels and 36,339 clothing parcels.



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# SISTER SUSIE'S SEWING SHIRTS FOR SOLDIERS

Sister Susie's Sewing Shirts was a popular 1914 tongue-twister song penned by R. P. Weston with music by Herman Darewski. It was widely performed with Al Jolson recording the song in 1916.

Sister Susie is an amusing parody as the young seamstress's efforts were found wanting and the recipients spurned her efforts.

'Sister Susie's sewing shirts for soldiers,  
Such skill at sewing shirts our shy young sister Susie shows!  
Some soldiers send epistles,  
Say they'd sooner sleep in thistles  
Than the saucy soft short shirts for soldiers sister Susie sews!'

Nonetheless, Sister Susie became a collective name for women making comforts for the war effort and the title was widely appropriated. Sister Susie's Knitting Socks for Soldiers is a popular derivation.

In 1915 May Gibbs adopted the title for her drawing of the patriotic sewing circle of gum nut babies and Red Cross kookaburra.



7.

3. Reproduced courtesy of the Australian War Memorial. AWM ref: 6764214. 4,5. Reproduced courtesy of Museum Victoria. 6. Reproduced courtesy of the Australian War Memorial. 7. May Gibbs, ca. 1915 Sister Susie's Sewing Shirts for Soldiers. National Library of Australia. © The Northcott Society and the Cerebral Palsy Alliance.





# THE KNITTING CRAZE

At the outbreak of war, knitting became a craze. We caught it as we caught the craze for ping-pong and diablo... No feminine attire was complete unless a knitting bag swung jauntily over the arm, ... at every available opportunity, out came the needles. We knitted in tram-cars, in trains, at meetings and at functions where (had they been there to see) the shades of, our grandmothers must have risen in horror. Some begrudged even the hours spent in church and ministers have preached to the click of the needles. It became usual to prefix one's conversation with such remarks as "How's your sock?" and "Oh, I've turned the heel" or "This is my second pair" was the reply to be expected.

(Mildura Cultivator, 19 May 1917, p 12)

'It is not an infrequent sight to see young girls in Nhill, when taking their afternoon's walk, busily occupied in knitting socks for our soldier boys. Even the little school girls are doing their duty to their King and country and can now "turn a heel" when knitting as cleverly as their elder sisters.'

(Nhill Free Press, 2 July 1915, p 2)



1.



2.

# WANTED - 100,000 PAIRS OF SOCKS

The clarion call has come again to the women of our land in the form of a special appeal from the War Chest - Wanted 100,000 pairs of socks ... to cover the feet of men that have made Australia famous throughout the world, the men that will be henceforth be renowned in song and story as the 'bravest thing God ever made.' (Farmer and Settler, 4 May 1917, p 8)

The call for hand knitted woollen socks never abated as men in the cold and muddy trenches needed a continuous supply of clean, dry socks to protect them against 'trench foot'. 'Sock Appeals' were launched, targets set and volunteers constantly urged to both increase the number of socks they could knit and to ensure that the socks were of the highest quality.

The Red Cross Division Competition included categories for four types of sock: (4 ply) French Heel, (4 ply) Dutch Heel, (wheeling) French Heel, and (wheeling) Dutch Heel and entrants followed the general sock making pattern in the Red Cross Booklet.

French Heel:

A rounded heel with gusset.

Dutch Heel:

A square heel with gusset.

Wheeling:

Coarsely spun woollen yarn suitable for hard wear, about the same gauge as modern 8 ply.



3.

**NO FEMININE ATTIRE WAS COMPLETE UNLESS A KNITTING BAG SWUNG JAUNTILY OVER THE ARM, ... AT EVERY AVAILABLE OPPORTUNITY, OUT CAME THE NEEDLES. WE KNITTED IN TRAM-CARS, IN TRAINS, AT MEETINGS AND AT FUNCTIONS.**



# 'BUSY BEES'

Female employees of Port Melbourne biscuit manufacturing company Swallow & Ariell established a patriotic working 'Bee'. Known as the Busy Bees, the group numbered 884 in June 1915. The group was very active and its significant and inspiring achievements were often recorded in the press. The Bees took out several prizes in the Red Cross Division competition at the 1916 Show.

'A striking example of the splendid results that can be accomplished by sustained and systematic effort in voluntary war work is afforded by the achievements of the 'busy- bee workers' connected with Swallow and Ariell's factory. Since the beginning of the war the girls of the busy-bee organisation have devoted their leisure hours to the manufacture of comforts for the men at the front. Their record to date comprises the production of 4939 'good luck' shirts, 1545 leather Cardigans, 23,461 Cardigan handkerchiefs, 52 pairs bed socks, 36 pyjama suits, 503 cholera belts, 20 pairs knee pads, 144 Balaclava helmets, 51 pairs of mittens, 1474 pairs knitted socks.

(Age, 26 October 1917, p 6)

## BUSY BEES' SOCK COMPETITION

'The untiring and energetic organisation Swallow and Ariell's "Busy Bees" are now holding a knitting competition open to all-comers. It is to assist the appeal made for 100,000 pairs of socks. Contributions of knitted socks, competitive or non-competitive, will be eagerly welcomed. Swallow and Ariell have donated £9 9/- as prizes.

(Table Talk, 24 May 1917, p 32).

Note: the competition contributed 930 pairs of socks for the appeal.  
(Kyneton Guardian 12 July 1917, p 2)



4.



5.

**BUSY BEES GAINED SIX 1ST PRIZES AND THREE 2ND PRIZES FOR THEIR SEWN FLANNEL GARMENTS AT THE 1916 ROYAL MELBOURNE SHOW**





# KNITTING KNOW-HOW

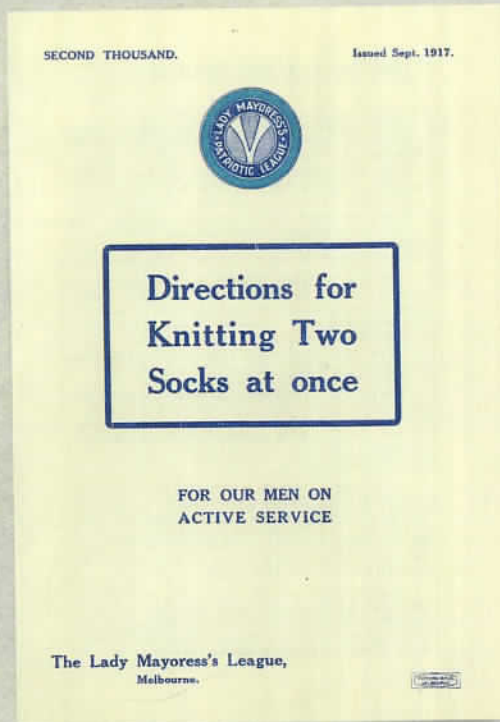
## The Correct Way To Knit'

Despite the many instructions issued from official bodies, a recurring problem throughout the war period was the quality of some items produced for the troops. This was evidenced in the Red Cross Division competition at the Royal Melbourne Show with judges having to reject several excellent entries, as they had not followed the Red Cross patterns. (*Leader*, 30 September 1916, p 4). Sock quality (or lack of) seemed particularly prevalent and ongoing pleas for care and attention to detail can be found in the contemporary press. .'

## 'The Careless Knitter'

Even after three years of war some knitters have apparently not taken the trouble to rid themselves of those faults that characterise the work of the amateur knitter, and do not realise that bad knitting not only reflects upon their ability, but causes serious inconvenience to the soldier that has to wear the socks they have knitted. A seam down the back of a sock, or a ridge at the toe will soon injure the soldier's feet and will probably compel him to fall out when on the march.'

(Aunt Merrythought for *Farmer and Settler*, 7 December 1917, p 10)



Issued by the Lady Mayoress's Patriotic League, Melbourne (The state branch of the ACF) *Directions for Knitting Two Socks at once* noted that this 'should not be attempted by beginners.'

Note: The Australian War Memorial (AWM) has reproduced the booklet online in full. See [https://www.awm.gov.au/sites/default/files/souvenirs8\\_2\\_2\\_1\\_socks.pdf](https://www.awm.gov.au/sites/default/files/souvenirs8_2_2_1_socks.pdf)

## Crimped Wool Solution

Take the ball of "crimped" wool, and wind it loosely round the backs of the chairs, thus reeling or winding it into a skein. When the wool of one sock is thus disposed of secure the ends and tie the skein with string in about four places, so that it cannot get tangles. Soak thoroughly in cold water, and boil. Stretch the skein out to its full size, and hang in the sun. When dry the wool ought to be as soft and straight as if new. The socks when re-knitted will only need to be pressed.'

(*The Colac Herald*, 24 October 1917, p 5)

## Remedies for Knitting in the Heat

As the warmer weather approaches the zest with which one attacks the manufacture of socks, gloves, caps, etc., diminishes perceptibly and one is tempted to declare that it is "much too hot for knitting."

It sometimes helps to keep near one a vessel of powdered boric acid, and dust the hands occasionally with that, or a weak solution of vinegar and water, or of alsu and water give temporary coolness to the hands and help to make things bearable.

And as our men have shown what Australia can produce in endurance of the big things of war, let no show at least endurance in our smaller things, and keep on knitting.

(*The West Australian*, 23 November 1915 p 7)

## Don'ts For Knitters

Complaints come to hand at intervals of the manner in which some socks are knitted. Some are said to be too long, others too short, and so on. In order to

got over the difficulty the Red Cross Society in Melbourne has formulated a number of "don't's" for knitters, and these have been sent to branches.

They are as follow :-

**Don't** start to knit a sock without washing the wool - dip the skein into warm water and dry before winding.

**Don't** cast on lightly-the top should stretch 15 inches.

**Don't** knit any fancy designs-they will prevent the knitting stretching its fullest extent.

**Don't** tie knot in wool to join - with a needle run one end of the wool into the other.

**Don't** knit double heels in thick wool.

**Don't** make hard lumps at the toes - weave off the end of the socks, as is directed in the Red Cross Book.

**Don't** press the ribbing, when pressing the finished sock.

A pattern of the correct style of sock may be obtained on application to the secretary of the local branch (Miss Fawcett).

(*Stawell News and Pleasant Creek Chronicle*, 23 May 1917, p 3)



# KNIT A RED CROSS SOCK

## SOCK PATTERN FROM THE RED CROSS SOCIETY BOOKLET

Yarn: Any sock yarn, 4 or 5 ply equivalent

Needles: 2.75mm set of double pointed

Cast on 60 stitches using any very flexible cast-on. Leave a tail of at least 25cm.

Work one row of K2 P2 rib before joining into a circle with 20sts on each of three needles.

Continue in rounds of K2 P2 for 10cm.

Change to stocking stitch and continue in rounds for 15cm

Heel Flap: K30 stitches, turn and purl these 30 stitches. Continue in stocking stitch on these 30 stitches for another 29 rows, making a total of 31 rows on these 30 stitches. The next step will be easier if you slip the first stitch of each of these 31 rows. Turn Heel:

P18, P2 together, P1, turn

K8, slip 1, K1, pass slipped stitch over the knitted stitch, K1, turn

P9, P2 tog, P1, turn

K10, sl1, K1, pss0, K1, turn P11 etc

K12 etc

until all stitches are on one needle.

Heel Gusset:

Pick up 16 stitches down the side of the heel, K30 across instep, pick up 16 sts on the other side of the heel, total of 80 stitches.

Decrease (K2 tog; or K1, sl1, pss0) before and after the instep on every second row until 60 stitches remain.

### Foot:

Continue in stocking stitch until the foot is 20cm long for the medium size.

### Toe:

Decrease (K2tog; or K1, sl1, pss0) once on each side of the foot on both top and bottom of sock in every 4th row twice, in every 3rd row three times, in every 2nd row three times and in every row three times. 16 stitches remain.

Graft the toe using Kitchener stitch.

Contemporary adaptation of sock pattern from the Red Cross Society Booklet,

Australian Branch by Susan Campbell-Wright, 2015



**"DON'T START A SOCK WITHOUT WASHING THE WOOL - DIP THE SKEIN IN WARM WATER AND DRY BEFORE WINDING."**

RED CROSS 1916

Image credits: 1. Reproduced courtesy of the Australian War Memorial. AWM ref: 6764214.

2. Women sewing at the Melbourne Town Hall for the Australian Comforts Fund, ca. 1916. Reproduced courtesy of the Australian War Memorial. AWM ref: 6764214



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RASV | HERITAGE



# THE SONG OF THE SOCK

Popular rhymes and songs emerged during the war years and are an evocative record of the war effort at home. Often with the same title, they circulated in the popular press and were printed in various Australian newspapers.

## 'A KNTTTING SONG' – ORIGINAL POETRY

KNIT, KNIT, KNIT:  
'TIS A TIME OF PERIL AND WAR,  
AND THOUSANDS OF KNITTERS ARE  
HARD AT WORK,  
WHO NEVER HAVE KNITTED BEFORE.  
MITTENS OF SCARVES AND SOCKS.  
AND A CAP TO KEEP ONE WARM:  
MAY THEY ACT, TOGETHER AND DO  
THEIR PART  
TO KEEP BRAVE MEN FROM HARM.  
KNIT, KNIT, KNIT:  
'TIS A WOOLLEN COAT OF MAIL.  
TO GUARD AND PROTECT FROM COLD  
AND DISEASE.  
AND TO KEEP OUR SOLDIERS HALE.  
KNIT, KNIT, KNIT:  
EITHER MITTENS, OR BELTS, OR  
A SCARF,  
AND EVERY STITCH IS A PRAYER  
AND WISH  
FOR GOOD ON THE WEARER'S BEHALF.  
KNIT, KNIT, KNIT:  
BY THE MOTHERS, THE DAUGHTERS,  
AND WIVES.  
FOR IN ALL SPARE MOMENTS ARE  
KNITTERS AT WORK  
FOR MEN WHO ARE RISKING  
THEIR LIVES;  
THE NEEDLES IN MANY FAIR HANDS  
ARE KNITTING FOR SOME BRAVE LAD,  
AND, FINGERS GROW SKILLED IN A  
LABOR OF LOVE  
THOUGH THE HEART OF THE  
KNITTER IS SAD.

KNIT, KNIT, KNIT:  
DARK THOUGHTS ROUND THE  
KNITTER CROWD,  
AND SHE WONDERS WHETHER THE  
COAT OF MAIL  
MAY NOT ALSO BECOME A SHROUD  
BUT HOPE WITH ITS RESTFUL CHARM  
BEARS MUCH OF THE KNITTER'S STRAIN,  
AND WITH HOPE AS A LENS SHE SEES  
THE DAY  
WHEN THE HEROES COME HOME AGAIN.  
KNIT, KNIT, KNIT:  
'MAY THE NEED OF THE KNITTING SOON  
CEASE,  
AND MAY OUR DEFENDERS OF RIGHT  
PREVAIL,  
AND THE WORLD BE BLESSED WITH  
PEACE.  
MAY THOSE, WHO ARE DOING THEIR  
PART  
AT THE STERN COMMAND OF FATE,  
CRUSH DOWN THE DOCTRINE OF BLOOD  
AND IRON,  
AND TRIUMPH O'ER PRIDE AND HATE.  
C. W. LEWIS. 1915

(Daily Herald, 10 July 1915, p.10;  
Southern Times, 19 August 1915, p 4;  
Newcastle Morning Herald & Miner's  
Advocate, 17 July 1915, p 2)

## 'SONG OF THE SOCK'

There is a girl at Armidale (N.S.W.) who has  
already knitted 100 pairs of socks for soldiers.  
She is still on the knit.

Others may sing of the "Song of the Shirt,"  
and praise all the girls that stitch,  
But I have a heroine in my heart who knits at  
a wondrous pitch,  
Swiftly, so swiftly her fingers fly as each  
lightning twist she locks —

Knit! Knit! Knit!  
Bit by bit,  
She fashions the soldiers' socks.  
Hour after hour, wherever she be, she "purls"  
and she "plains" away,  
Knitting by night with dreamy eyes, and her  
thoughts with the boys away;  
Each "purl" a prayer for a soldier lad, each  
"plain" is a kindly deed—'

Knit! Knit! Knit!  
Bit by bit,  
This is her war time creed.  
How many prayers in a soldier's sock!  
What thoughts in a hundred pair!  
How many million blessings go in the labor  
that's measured there?  
There are worlds of good wishes in every  
"plain" and oceans in every "purl"

Knit! Knit! Knit!  
Bit by bit  
Boys, bless this Armidale girl!

(THE ARMIDALE EXPRESS AND NEW ENGLAND  
GENERAL ADVERTISER, 9 NOVEMBER 1917 P 3)

'The Song of the Sock' Suggested by "The  
Song of the Shirt."

With fingers dainty and trim,  
With needles busy and bright,  
Each woman you meet  
In the house or the street  
Is knitting the socks for her knight—  
A knight that she never may see,  
A hero she never will know;  
Yet her eyes are dim  
For the unknown him,  
Fighting a pitiless foe.

Knit — knit — knit!  
Instead of mere walking the Block;  
And knit—knit—knit!  
While the clicking needles dart and flit,  
Making accompaniment fit  
To this — her Song of the Sock.

"Knit—knit—knit!  
For the comfort of those who fight;  
And knit—knit—knit!  
For the cause of Right 'gainst Might.  
It's never a knot, but splice the wool—  
Slip and bind; knit two together—  
Purl and plain—(My heart is full  
Of the anxious thoughts that gather.)

Knit—knit—knit!  
He, whoever he be,  
Has a mother, sister, wife,  
Waiting for him across the sea—  
Waiting the end of the strife.  
Knit—knit—knit!  
A woman knits for a life!



# COMFORTS AND CORRESPONDENCE

Volunteers making items for the troops were encouraged to include notes for the recipients. The Australian Comforts Fund (ACF) booklet 'Directions for Standard Socks for our Men on Active Service' (September 1918) emphasised the importance of this practice. 'REMEMBER! That our men like to find some written message inside their socks, as evidence that the socks are gifts.'

Receiving a return note of thanks from soldiers at the front was cause for great excitement. These letters were treasured by the makers and often printed in newspapers as a means of sharing news, reinforcing how valuable the comforts were and to encourage makers to maintain their efforts.

Some 'cheeky' messages were also received from men at the front in response to the knitting quality. The following note was widely published in the press:

**'Received your socks  
And they are 'some' fit.  
Am wearing one as a helmet  
And the other as a mit.  
Am glad to learn you are doing  
your bit.  
But who the dickens taught  
you to knit'**

(Kilmore Advertiser,  
22 September 1917, p 2)

This rhyme was a popular message sent to the troops:

**Knitted in the tram-car,  
Knitted in the street,  
Knitted by the fireside,  
Knitted in the heat;  
Knitted in Australia,  
Where the Wattle grows,  
Sent to you in France dear,  
Just to warm your toes.  
Knitted by the seaside,  
Knitted in the train,  
Knitted in the sunshine,  
Knitted in the rain.  
Knitted here and knitted there,  
With a glad refrain.  
May the one that wears them,  
Come back to us again.**

This was found in a pair of socks sent from Leongatha and reprinted in the AIF miniature paper "The Rising Sun," (dated Somewhere in France, January 25, 1917) which was sent to relatives at home.

(Great Southern Star (Leongatha, Vic.), 13 April 1917, p 2)



1.



2.



3.

**'MOTHER'S  
KNITTED SOCKS,  
SWEATERS AND  
SINGLETS HAVE  
JUST ABOUT  
SAVED MY LIFE  
AND REMIND ME  
OF HOME AND  
MOTHER'.**

CAPTAIN EDWARD RAE  
CORDNER 1916





## LETTERS OF APPRECIATION

To Miss Daisy Douglas, Winslow,

"Just a line to thank you very sincerely, for those socks and your kind wishes. We got them just as we came out of the firing line for a rest. They are splendid socks - and as good as half a dozen pairs, that are issued or that we can buy over here. I really cannot say enough for the splendid work you girls are doing. There is very little news that I can tell, because as you know all our letters are censored. We are out for a rest at present, but it won't be for long.

I am a 'Tassie' boy, but was in Broadmeadows Camp seven weeks after I left 'Tassie,' and I can tell you we had a fine time. I wish you a merry Xmas and Happy New Year.

I would feel highly favored if you would kindly answer these few lines. You know it is lovely to get letters from good old Australians. I must again thank you very sincerely for your kindness."

From Pte H H Stone,  
somewhere in France, 4 November, 1916

(Warrnambool Standard,  
4 January 1917, p 3)

To Miss Sarah McKernan,

During my convalescence I was handed a pair of sox, and inside I found your address. I am taking the liberty of writing you a few words of thanks for them. No one can imagine how eager we are for sox, especially in the winter time. I am in camp now in England having completely recovered from my wounds that I received during our dash for Bapaume. I am expecting to be sent back to France again at any time. I don't like the idea of going back at all, as I have been in the field for two years and am just about sick of it, but I have been through it before, and I can go through it again I suppose. I am a South Australian. I must not forget to thank you for the sox, as they are as good a thing as anyone could get, and no one is more pleased at the end of a march (and we have some long ones in France) than we are to get a clean, dry pair of sox to put on. It seems to put new life into a man, and I can hardly thank you enough for them. My powers as a writer are too poor to allow me to thank you sufficiently. Thanking you as well as I can for your kindness.

Believe me to be yours very gratefully.

Pte. GILLEN F. LUCAS 19 June

(Euroa Advertiser, 24 August 1917, p 17)

The Hon. Sec., Busy Bee Knitting Club,  
231 Bell St. Coburg:

Dear Miss Robinson

Just a line in answer to a note received in a pair of socks from The Busy Bees. We had just come back from the trenches and had not a dry thing on us until we got well back, then we received the socks. There not being a pair to each man, we had to draw lots, and I won a pair, and I can tell you they were very nice and warm. I got a surprise when I found out they came from Coburg as Coburg is where I've lived for 10 years. I even went to the Coburg State school. Well enough do I remember Mr Sheehan. My people are now living at 66 Loch St., Coburg. I've seen several Coburg boys since I've been over here, but I cannot say if you know any of them - Frank Pridham, Arthur Broom, Allan Cunningham, Jack Phillips, and even others too numerous to mention.

I think this is all I can say just now, so I shall close with best wishes for a Happy Xmas. I remain, your truly, SIG. K. HOLTON, 8th Battn. A.I.F. France.

(Brunswick and Coburg Leader,  
21 December 1917, p 1)



## LETTERS OF APPRECIATION

THANKS VERY MUCH FOR THE PARCEL COMING FOR XMAS. BY THE WAY SEND ME AS MANY SOCKS AS YOU CAN GET FOR ME. DURING THE LAST COUPLE OF WEEKS I HAVE FINISHED OFF THREE PAIR. IT HAS BEEN TERRIBLE WEATHER, AND THE MUD IS UP OVER OUR LEGGINGS IN PLACES. THERE ARE AN ALARMING NUMBER OF MEN GOING AWAY WITH BAD FEET ON ACCOUNT OF MUD AND WET FEET ALL THE TIME, SO SOCKS SOON WEAR OUT. I AM PLASTERING MY FEET WITH OIL, ETC., AND I AM THANKFUL TO SAY THEY ARE IN AS GOOD A CONDITION AS WHEN I WAS NOT IN THE MUD. "

LANCE CORPORAL W KIEL, AUSTRALIAN FIELD AMBULANCE IN FRANCE.

(PORTLAND GUARDIAN,  
10 JANUARY 1917, p 3)

### [LETTER SENT TO PARENTS]

Those warm woolly garments I received from home when in Egypt, and which I thought at the time would never be required, are very useful, and much appreciated. Father's mackintosh is much in evidence, likewise the waterproof leggings and the leather jacket. Mother's knitted socks, sweaters and singlets have just about saved my life, and remind me of home and mother. Home, I wonder when I shall see it again!

Captain (Dr) Edward Rae Cordner,  
Egypt to France

(Bendigonian, 27 July 1916 p 3)

*A few lines to thank you for the Anzac parcel, which came to hand safely, and was very acceptable, more especially the warm socks, as we are expecting several feet of snow in a couple of months, so will need something to keep our feet warm. The shirt was even more useful, as I met a Williamstown boy just from the trenches at Pozieres with only about a square foot of rag on his back, so I gave it to him and he was made. It is nice to know that our good ladies at home are looking after us so well and have not forgotten us altogether, and I can assure you we all appreciate it. Nearly all the boys I have met have received them, and are very pleased with them, as it is sometimes very hard to get a clean change. All those I have met - and that's not a few - are looking real fine, although they've had a pretty rough time, and it is not getting much better yet. They are looking forward to an early 'finish to 'Fritz' and a trip home again; they're not growling and can always raise a lively song at the end of a hard day's work. Again thanking you, I remain. -  
Yours sincerely, J. SCOTT.*

(Williamstown Advertiser,  
6 January 1917, p 3)

Dear Miss Bavinton, [Head Teacher]

I have just received the pair of socks which you have very kindly sent me together with the booklet containing the letter and the names of those who shared in the making of the socks. I am indeed touched by the kind thoughts of your scholars in making and sending me this little gift, which I all the more appreciate, when you tell me it has been the means of further increasing your patriotic fund for the benefit of our Australian soldiers. I think it is really wonderful that your school, with only ten pupils, has been able to build up a fund of £50, and you may well be proud of the result. Would you kindly convey to all my grateful thanks for your gift and the good wishes which accompanied it, and for all the good work you are doing on behalf of our men who do indeed deserve everything that can be done for them in recognition of their splendid service for over three years now. With my kind regards and good wishes to you and your school for the present year.

Yours sincerely (Signed)  
W. F. BIRDWOOD 1st Anzac Corps,  
B.E.F. France, 15 January 1918

NB At the Ni Ni East State school recent patriotic celebration, it was decided to knit a pair of socks to be sent direct to General Birdwood. As a means of raising money for the patriotic funds, a charge of 3d was made to knit one row of these socks, which resulted in a goodly sum being raised. Mrs C. McCabe and Miss Bavinton (head teacher) put the finishing touches on the socks before being dispatched.

(Nhill Free Press, 19 April 1918, p 2)



BLUE RIBBONS TO BALACLAVAS  
THE RED CROSS DIVISION COMPETITION AT THE ROYAL MELBOURNE SHOW



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This publication accompanies an exhibition of the same name that was first shown at the Royal Melbourne Show, 2015.

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### Australia

*All Work No Pay: Australian Civilian Volunteers in War*, Melanie Oppenheimer, Ohio Productions, 2002.

*Australians at Home: World War I*, Michael McKernan, redesigned edition Five Mile Press, 2014.

*Australian Women and War*, Melanie Oppenheimer, Department of Veterans' Affairs, 2008.

*Australian War Memorial blogs: Knitting for the Troops* <https://www.aum.gov.au/blog/2013/10/25/knitting-troops/>

*One Million Pairs of Socks by Prudence Black* <http://theconversation.com/one-million-pairs-of-socks-knitting-for-victory-in-the-first-world-war-30149>

*Woollen Comforts from Home* <http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/stories/woollen-comforts-home>

### Britain

*The First World War and Knitting* by K. L. Bevan [http://www.knitrowan.com/files/downloadfiles/Digital Mag 56\\_LR.pdf](http://www.knitrowan.com/files/downloadfiles/Digital%20Mag%2056_LR.pdf)

*Current Crafts Craze Echoes World War I Knitting Projects* by Jane Tynan <http://ww1centenary.oucs.ox.ac.uk/memoryofwar/crafts-craze-echoes-world-war-i-knitting-projects/>

**BLUE RIBBONS TO BALACLAVAS** The Red Cross Division Competition at the Royal Melbourne Show. Generously supported by the Anzac Centenary Local Grants Program through the Australian Government Department of Veterans' Affairs. Produced by RASV Heritage 2015. Curator/Author: Annette Shiell. Research Assistance: Amanda Bede and Angela Bailey. Design: Commotion Creative.



1.



2.

Image credits: 1. Women making and packing comforts for men of the 30th Battalion, ca. 1916 Reproduced courtesy of the Australian War Memorial. AWM ref: 6764214. 2. Reproduced courtesy of the State Library of NSW. Three women spinning wool to knit socks for soldiers during World War I - Tenterfield, NSW c.1915.