

MEETING REPORTS

JULY 2014 MEETING

Speaker: Dr Ian Willis

Topic: God, King and Country –
the local Red Cross Branch



Our guest speaker for July, Dr Ian Willis, presented a very informative talk on the history of Red Cross in Australia. He referred firstly to the formation of the Red Cross and its local branches across Australia and then made some specific reference to Red Cross in Illawarra.

The Australian Red Cross Society was established as a voluntary and humanitarian organisation 100 years ago on 13 August 1914 just after the outbreak of World War 1. The organisation began as the Australian Branch of the British Red Cross Society at Government House Melbourne with Lady Helen Munro Ferguson, wife of the then Australian Governor-General, as its first President. Later, in 1914 the Australian Red Cross established a network of Divisions in each Australian State with the wives of each State Governor as Divisional Presidents. A number of high ranking women from established, 'well connected' and influential families with social connections were appointed to governing committees.

Women constituted the vast majority of its membership and took leading positions within the organisation as it quickly expanded across urban and rural areas. By the end of 1914 in New South Wales, for example, the Red Cross Society had over 80 branches in city and suburban areas and nearly 250 branches in country, rural areas.

In 1918 the Junior Red Cross was formally established in Australia building on its foundations in NSW.

In 1927 the Australian Red Cross was recognised as a national society in its own right by the International Committee of Red Cross and was incorporated by Royal Charter in 1941.



The Red Cross became very well known for its success in organising volunteers to prepare 'comfort parcels' which were sent to servicemen overseas.

Ian made some particularly interesting references to Red Cross in Illawarra and pointed to the very strong support towards the war effort in our local Illawarra Branches. He referred to branches such as Corrimal, Dapto, Kiama, Wollongong and Woonona and noted that meetings at Branches were very well attended. For example, the Kiama Branch reported 300 financial members in October 1917 and Dapto reported 160 members at their Branch meeting in August 1919.

ILLAWARRA HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN

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Please address all mail to:
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Illawarra's Red Cross made a strong contribution to the war effort with 'comfort parcels', for example, knitted socks, clothes, blankets, bandages, books etc and was financially well supported through membership fees, donations and fundraising efforts across the local Branches.

Red Cross celebrates its centenary in Australia this year. Much more detail can be found on the Red Cross website relating to its history, community activities and centenary events. Ian's presentation was very timely and was warmly received and greatly appreciated. **TB**

