

2014

'Not like ordinary times': aspects of Australian nurses' experiences during the Great War

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‘Not like ordinary times’:
Aspects of Australian nurses’ experiences
during the Great War

Honours thesis submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the award of the degree

BACHELOR OF ARTS HONOURS

from

THE UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

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School of Humanities and Social Enquiry
Faculty of Law, Humanities and the Arts

2014

SYNOPSIS

The relationships formed between Australian military nurses and soldiers during the Great War played significant roles in these men and women's lives, yet this non-professional aspect of the nurses' experience of the war remains largely unexplored. Through relationships with the soldiers, the nurses were able to provide comfort and support to these men throughout the traumatic experience of war, often acting as temporary replacements for the absent family. The way in which these relationships operated, and the purpose they served, is examined through the various roles the nurses filled. These ranged from the romantic interest to mother, sister, confidante, moral guardian and diggeress. In examining the ways in which the nurses took on each role, it is clear that they frequently moved between them, often filling more than one at the same time. These roles were fluid, and therefore changed according to each situation and person. They were also complex, and the tendency to simplify them to meet popular expectations is addressed. By exploring the multi-faceted nature of these interactions, a more complete picture of the personal lives of the nurses is provided.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis is entirely my own work except where I have given full documented references to the work of others, and that the material contained in this thesis has not been submitted for formal assessment in any formal course and the word length is 17 484.

Jaclyn Hopkins

(3674034)

October 2014.

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AANS	Australian Army Nursing Service
AGH	Australian General Hospital
AWL	Absent without leave
AWM	Australian War Memorial
ACCS	Australian Casualty Clearing Station
CCS	Casualty Clearing Station
NAA	National Archives of Australia

INTRODUCTION¹

Three days after the Anzac landing on the Gallipoli Peninsula, and before the influx of wounded men had reached the hospitals in Cairo, Olive Haynes wrote home to her sister, Nell. 'I am sending a bit of poetry one of the patients composed. Geoff might like it for his paper,' she suggested. 'They are always so keen on "our boys" – no one ever hears of "our girls"'.² She had a point. In the years following the Great War, published diaries, letters and memoirs written by the soldiers appeared, whilst many more were donated to public institutions such as libraries and museums in their unpublished forms. Far less common were published works by the nurses or the donation of their letters and diaries to public institutions. In part, this reflected the fact that in terms of simple numbers, nurses were a very small part of the First AIF. Yet, it is also clear that they, and their experiences, were basically ignored. However, over the last twenty years, a growing body of literature devoted to the Australian nurses during the Great War has worked towards addressing this gap in Australia's historiography of the war.

The literature has primarily focussed upon the professional aspects of nursing on active service, especially working conditions including nursing in CCS's, field hospitals, convalescent hospitals, transport trains and ships, and the conflicts and difficulties that accompanied the introduction of a voluntary group of women into the medical hierarchy of the military. It also includes the different geographical locations the women were posted to, and the problems they posed, from England and France to Salonika, Egypt and India. And it examines the impact that nursing in wartime could, and did, have on these women emotionally and professionally.

The exploration of the emotional impact of nursing during the war has signalled a new focus by historians on the more personal and emotional sides of nursing and the nurses' experiences. This has included the nurses' identification with their patients, the emotional and psychological support they provided them, as well as romantic liaisons with the soldiers. Notably, the romantic lives of the nurses have gained greater attention in recent years. Katie Holmes was one of the first historians to argue that there was more to the history of military

¹ The conventions set out in the *History Style Guide*, issued by the Faculty, have been used for this thesis. In all cases, quotations have kept the spelling, abbreviations and punctuation used in the original.

² Olive Haynes, *We Are Here, Too: The Diaries and Letters of Sister Olive L.C. Haynes, November 1914 to February 1918*, compiled by Margaret Young (Adelaide: Australian Down Syndrome Association, 1991), p. 37.

nurses than just the professional demands the war made of them and explored this through an analysis of the nurses as mother, sister and lover.³ This has proved to be a significant influence upon further research into the relationships and personal lives of the nurses, even if Holmes' particular approach to the subject matter was a limited one, as will be discussed in parts of this thesis.

There have also recently been parallels drawn between the experiences of the nurses and soldiers, particularly in terms of the nurses' appropriation of 'digger' to describe their experiences of the war. The increasing interest in the non-professional aspects of the nurses' lives reflects the developing view that the service these women provided extended far beyond the physical and technical skills of nursing itself. The thesis reflects this approach, and builds upon these examples.

It is an empirical work. Using case studies, it explores the non-professional roles and the private lives of the nurses. The notion of the roles these women filled working within a larger, unofficial network of support, temporarily replacing far-away family members, is used as a way of exploring the complexities of these non-professional aspects to the nurses' lives. In doing so, it hopes to make a contribution towards a more complete picture of the experiences of the nurses who served during the Great War.

Thesis outline

Chapter 1 begins with a brief survey of the sources used for the thesis, followed by a literature review which also establishes how the key theoretical concepts, notions of fictive kinship, adoptive kin and surrogate families, frame the thesis. The methodological issue of reconstructed memories being presented as the truth, as raised in the memoirs of Gertrude Moberly and May Tilton, are discussed.

Chapter 2 examines the notions and expectations of romance in wartime, and the different forms this could take. It begins with the popular notion of the wartime romance and how this has often been seen as characteristic of the relationship between Alice Ross King and Harry Moffitt and, to a lesser degree, Olive Haynes and Pat Dooley, but argues that this view has tended to obscure the realities of these romances. It then examines a relationship characterised

³ Katie Holmes, 'Day Mothers and Night Sisters: World War I Nurses and Sexuality', in Joy Damousi and Marilyn Lake (eds.), *Gender and War: Australians at War in the Twentieth Century* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 47-49.

by jealousy and possessiveness as evident in the letters to Lucy Pitman before looking at the place of flirting between nurse and patient using autograph books, which includes a re-evaluation of the relationship between Laura Grubb and Dave Sharpie.

Chapter 3 examines the multiple meanings that could be associated with the noun 'Sister'. The chapter argues that the noun itself had three levels of meaning: a professional meaning, a literal meaning (where women joined their brothers in volunteering) and a meaning reflecting the notion of the surrogate family where nurses extended the notions of the family to the men they nursed. A particular focus on the interplay between the blood related and surrogate sister roles explores the protective element inherent in it. Examples used include Agnes Jones, Elsie Grant and Anne Donnell. Some of the nurses used in this thesis also acted as confidantes for the men they nursed. The autograph books kept by Mary Inger and Sister A. Bertish (who served with the Queen Alexandra's Imperial Nursing Military Service) are used to illustrate the role of the nurse as confidante.

Chapter 4 examines how the nurses acted as surrogate mothers to their patients, and the way in which, for Anne Donnell, this was motivated by empathy for the mothers back home. The role of the nurses as a moral police to the soldiers is also explored, followed by a brief analysis of the nurses' appropriation of part of men's experiences as a part of their war, in the idea of the 'diggeress', a noun coined by Laura Grubb in 1917, and one that was adopted by Gertrude Moberly in her memoirs.

CHAPTER ONE

Sources and Literature Review

Sources

Sources relating to fifteen nurses were used for this thesis. The largest single source was ten of the collections held by the Australian War Memorial. These collections include a diverse range of material: letters, diaries, autograph books, photographs and other ephemera. They were donated to the Memorial after the war by the nurses themselves, or their families. Some of these collections contain more material than others, yet, taken as a group, they reflect the multi-faceted nature of these women's experiences during the war. The most important for this thesis were the diaries of Alice Ross King, the letters of Evelyn Davies, the autograph books kept by Mary Inger and Sister Bertish, and the collection donated by Laura Grubb. Other sources were as follows. The letters of Agnes Jones came from a private collection. The letters of two nurses used in the thesis, Anne Donnell and Olive Haynes, appeared in published form. Donnell's letters appeared as a book in 1920. Olive Haynes' letters did not appear in published form until 1991. The memoirs of two nurses, Gertrude Moberly and May Tilton, made up the fifteen. Both are discussed as examples of reconstructed memory later in this chapter.

The Personnel Dossiers of the First AIF were used to establish the service record of some of the women studied as a supplement to material held in the War Memorial's collections. They were also used, where relevant, to provide a broader context for the women's stories where male family members were concerned. This was particularly important for Maud Ashdown, Elsie Grant and Gertrude Moberly. The Personnel Dossiers also solved the mystery surrounding the identity of one of the men who contributed to Sister Bertish's autograph book.

Literature Review

It has been well established by Australian military nursing historians that the history of Australian military nursing in the Great War (and beyond) has been generally neglected. With the exception of A.G. Butler's single chapter on the AANS in the third volume of his *Official History of the Australian Army Medical Services, 1914-18* (published in 1943), what Kirsty

Harris called a ‘largely hidden occupation’ remained so until the 1980s.¹ However, as Jan Bassett argued, the works published during this time by Patsy Adam-Smith, Rupert Goodman and Marianne Barker ‘tend[ed] to sanctify their subjects’.² A comprehensive social history of the AANS, and a more realistic portrayal of its members by Bassett in *Guns and Brooches* addressed these issues, and laid the foundation for further research in the field. Ruth Rae in *Scarlet Poppies* and *Veiled Lives* was the first historian to narrow the focus specifically to nurses during the Great War. Her work provides considerable detail in relation to each theatre of war in which Australian nurses served throughout the conflict, including the administrative problems accompanying the arrival of women within the military hierarchy, the nature of their work and, for some, the emotional cost that came with wartime nursing.³

The increase of literature in the field attests to the relatively wider recognition of the experiences of military nurses. However, Kirsty Harris has argued that limiting and sanctifying portrayals of the nurses have continued: ‘To date, the dominant narrative of military nursing has been either one of “devotion to duty” or the populist public view of the heroic “angel of mercy”’. *More Than Bombs and Bandages* offers a different perspective of the nurses through a specific focus upon the labour of wartime nursing itself.⁴ Harris has also examined other aspects of the military nursing occupation, including the complicated working relationships between Australian and British nurses, and the experiences of those nurses who worked on transport duty.⁵ Other histories exploring specific aspects of military nursing during the war include Melanie Oppenheimer’s history of Australian Red Cross nurses, and Ruth Rae’s examination of the particularly isolating experiences of the AANS nurses who

¹ A.G. Butler, *Official History of the Australian Army Medical Services, 1914-1918 Volume III – Special Problems and Services* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1943), pp. 527-589; Kirsty Harris, *More Than Bombs and Bandages: Australian Army Nurses at Work in World War I* (Newport NSW: Big Sky Publishing, 2011), p. 2.

² Patsy Adam-Smith, *Australian Women at War* (Ringwood Vic: Penguin Books Australia, 1996 [1984]); Rupert Goodman, *Our War Nurses: The History of the Royal Australian Army Nursing Corps 1902-1988* (Brisbane: Boolarong Publications, 1988); Marianne Barker, *Nightingales in the Mud: The Digger Sisters of the Great War 1914-1918* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989); Jan Bassett, *Guns and Brooches: Australian Army Nursing from the Boer War to the Gulf War* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 1.

³ Ruth Rae, *Scarlet Poppies: The Army Experience of Australian Nurses during World War One* (Burwood: The College of Nursing, 2005); Ruth Rae, *Veiled Lives: Threading Australian Nursing History into the Fabric of the First World War* (Burwood: The College of Nursing, 2009).

⁴ Harris, *More Than Bombs and Bandages*, p. 4.

⁵ Kirsty Harris, ‘Red Rag to a British Bull?: Australian Trained Nurses Working with British Nurses During World War One’, in Kate Darian-Smith, Patricia Grimshaw, Kiera Lindsay and Stuart Macintyre (eds), *Exploring the British World: Identity, Cultural Production, Institutions* (Melbourne: RMIT Publishing, 2004), pp. 126-141; Kirsty Harris, ‘Red Reflections on the Sea: Australian Army Nurses serving at Sea in World War 1’, *The Journal of Australian Naval History*, vol. 6, no. 2 (2009), pp. 51-73.

served in India.⁶ All have expanded the range of knowledge on Australian military nursing during the war considerably.

Several works have focussed on the experience of individual nurses during wartime. These include influential nursing figures such as Matron Rose Creal, but more commonly they concentrate on the sisters and staff nurses.⁷ Melanie Oppenheimer's *Oceans of Love* provides insight into the experiences of one of the small number of Australian nurses who died whilst on service, Narrelle Hobbes.⁸ Peter Rees' *The Other Anzacs* presents the narratives of several nurses within the greater context of Australian nurses' experiences of the war.⁹ The story of one of these nurses, however, has been inaccurately portrayed, as will be examined in the following chapter. Janet Butler has argued that the challenges of wartime required a reassessment, or 're-imagining' of the self for the nurses. In terms of their experiences during the war, this meant using some of the more typically masculine attitudes that resonated with their experiences of active service, such as those associated with the digger and the Anzac legend. These came together in *Kitty's War*, an examination of Sister Kit McNaughton's diary with a focus on gender identity and gendered expectations of behaviour, amongst other issues. Butler's analysis of Kit McNaughton's negotiation of the diary format also demonstrates that the format of the primary source is just as revealing as what has been recorded in it, a matter reflected in the discussion of the memoirs of Moberly and Tilton below.¹⁰

Until recently, the literature has paid little attention to the significance of the relationships between Australian nurses and soldiers, with the exception of the risk the nurses' presence posed to the military in terms of sexual relationships with the soldiers, and the policy of the compulsory resignation for nurses who married whilst on active service.¹¹ Although Holmes argued that the nurses positioned themselves in the roles of mother and sister to their patients, in an attempt to deny the possibility of sexual attraction and relationships with them, she also argued that relationships between nurse and patient could be sexual, using Laura Grubb and

⁶ Melanie Oppenheimer, 'Gifts for France: Australian Red Cross Nurses in France, 1916-1919', *Journal of Australian Studies*, vol. 17, no. 39 (1993), pp. 65-78; Ruth Rae, 'Reading between unwritten lines: Australian Army Nurses in India, 1916-19', *Journal of the Australian War Memorial*, no. 36 (2002).

⁷ Kirsty Harris, 'Nursing in War and Peace: the life of Matron Rose Creal (1865-1921)', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, vol. 95, no. 1 (2009), pp. 77-93.

⁸ Melanie Oppenheimer, *Oceans of Love: Narrelle: An Australian Nurse in World War I* (Sydney: ABC Books, 2006).

⁹ Peter Rees, *The Other Anzacs: Nurses at War, 1914-1918* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2008).

¹⁰ Butler, *Kitty's War* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2013). See also Janet Butler, 'Journey into War', *Australian Historical Studies*, no. 127 (2006), pp. 203-217 and Janet Butler, 'Nursing Gallipoli: Identity and the Challenge of Experience', *Journal of Australian Studies*, vol. 27, no. 78 (2003), pp. 45-57.

¹¹ Bassett, *Guns and Brooches*, pp. 2, 39-40.

Dave Sharpie as an example.¹² This, however, has ignored the potential for relationships of a more platonic nature. Harris has touched upon relationships between the nurse and patient as a vital component of the labour of wartime nursing and Butler has examined nurse-patient relationships in terms of their significance to Kit McNaughton's wartime experiences and changing identity throughout that period.¹³ The different forms of these relationships, and their significance to the nurses and soldiers involved have not, however, formed the sole focus of any studies to date.

Jay Winter's notion of 'fictive kinship' and Bruce Scates' 'adoptive kin' demonstrate the unifying power of shared experiences of trauma and grief.¹⁴ Australian nurses and soldiers were undoubtedly bound together through such experiences, as well as united by the shared distance from their homes, families and friends, and the consequent need for more immediate sources of support. The interactions and relationships between Australian nurses and soldiers varied greatly, and both 'fictive kinship' and 'adoptive kin' have provided a framework with which to explore the informal, family-like networks of support that inevitably developed. In the context of this thesis, then, the networks of support formed between Australian nurses and soldiers whilst on active service have been labelled 'surrogate families'. There are, however, a few differences in how this framework has been applied. Winter and Scates have explored how surrogate families operated within established and static communities on the home front. Within the military context and due to the nature of the war, surrogate families on the battlefield were transitory and short-lived, yet served the same purpose.

The following texts, although not focussed specifically upon Australian military nursing during the war, or nursing at all, have proved useful tools in assessing the importance of relationships formed during wartime, their nature and how they operated. Michael Roper's investigation of the soldier's need for a continued relationship with his mother in times of emotional turbulence, despite their physical separation as a result of the war, was particularly useful when it came to analysing the nurses who assumed this role in a surrogate form.¹⁵ So, too, was Christine Hallett's *Containing Trauma*, which suggests that an essential element of wartime nursing was treating their soldier-patients emotionally and psychologically, as well

¹² Holmes, 'Day Mothers and Night Sisters', pp. 47-49.

¹³ Harris, *More Than Bombs and Bandages*, Chapter Six, Butler, *Kitty's War*.

¹⁴ Jay Winter, 'Forms of kinship and remembrance in the aftermath of the Great War', in Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan (eds.), *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 40-60; Bruce Scates, 'The Unknown Sock Knitter: Voluntary Work, Emotional Labour, Bereavement and the Great War', *Labour History*, no. 81 (2001), pp. 29-49.

¹⁵ Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), pp. 5-6.

physically.¹⁶ Santanu Das' analysis of intimacy in a selection of British nurses' memoirs provided useful examples of the significance of intimacy to nursing.¹⁷ Kate Hunter's examination of the intimacy of a courtship continued through the letters of a New Zealand soldier to his fiancée back home provide insight into the ways in which war altered patterns of middle class courtship.¹⁸ Graham Seal's history of the figure of the 'digger' has formed the context for an analysis of what the noun 'diggeress' could mean.¹⁹

Reconstructing Memory

As Thomson noted in his *Anzac Memories*, memories reflect a need to 'make sense of our past and present lives'.²⁰ Yet, as he established in his oral history, doing so did not always simply entail recounting what happened, but was a process of composing memory in a way that was tolerable for the individual, as well as presenting a narrative that would be publicly accepted.²¹ What was publicly acceptable, however, did not always reflect a particular individual's experiences of the war. Memories, then, were often re-purposed or reconstructed. His work is particularly relevant for two sources used for this thesis, the memoirs published by May Tilton²² and Gertrude Moberly²³ in 1933. The marked gap between the war and publication meant the potential for altering their war narratives was great. It is therefore worthwhile exploring this aspect of the memoir as both are used as sources in later chapters.

In delving into the construction of Percy Bird's memories of his service during the Great War, Thomson highlighted how remembering was an emotional and selective process: the narrative Percy composed focussed on those events that he could recall comfortably and with fondness, rather than those experiences which caused him pain, embarrassment or fear. For Percy, these were a discomfort with the larrikin nature of the 'digger culture' of the AIF and his transfer from the front lines in 1917.²⁴ He therefore omitted them from his constructed narrative of wartime memories. The malleability of memory here is the important point and it is clear that

¹⁶ Christine E. Hallett, *Containing Trauma: Nursing Work in the First World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), pp. 168-169.

¹⁷ Santanu Das, *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

¹⁸ Kate Hunter, 'More than an Archive of War: Intimacy and Manliness in the Letters of a Great War Soldier to the Woman he Loved, 1915-1919', *Gender and History*, vol. 25, no. 2 (2013), pp. 339-354.

¹⁹ Graham Seal, *Inventing Anzac: The Digger and National Mythology* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2004).

²⁰ Alistair Thomson, *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend* (new edition, Clayton: Monash University Publishing, 2013), p 11.

²¹ *ibid.*, pp. 11, 14 and 312.

²² May Tilton, *The Grey Battalion* (Sydney: Angus and Roberston, 1933).

²³ Gertrude Moberly, *The Experiences of a 'Dinki Di' R.R.C Nurse* (London: Virago Press, 2004) (1933).

²⁴ Thomson, *Anzac Memories*, p. 86.

Tilton and Moberly also moulded their wartime memories into particular representations of their experiences.

May Tilton's memoir *The Grey Battalion* provides a detailed account of her war experiences as a nurse, ranging from accounts of her tourist adventures to the heartbreaking stories of many of her patients. Yet one of the most significant aspects of Tilton's life and her experience of the war was given scarce attention in her book – her fiancé. Tilton makes no mention at all of being engaged to an Australian soldier until halfway through her memoir, at which time she was recounting the story of the besotted Canadian patient who repeatedly proposed to her. The patient refused to believe that she 'was already promised to an Aussie'.²⁵ Following this anecdote, Tilton and her 'one man in all the world' were unexpectedly reunited, and stationed in the same sector. While she wrote of the joy of the two months they were together and 'were happy as anyone could possibly be those days',²⁶ she was still comparatively sparse in the time and words she spent on recounting what must have been a particularly note-worthy time. The months following saw Tilton stationed in several CCS's across Belgium and northern France, and it is during this time that she wrote of her 'worried and anxious fiancé'²⁷ visiting her in a troubled state. Afterwards, she learnt that he believed that 'Every man has a premonition of his fate up here, before the end.'²⁸ Two months later, Tilton read her fiancé's name on a list of those killed in action.

Tilton did not mention her fiancé again. There is not a word in regards to his family, where he was buried (if anywhere), how she missed him, or how she dealt with her grief; details typical surrounding the loss of a loved one. The fiancé also remained unnamed throughout the entire memoir, even in the moments in which he was featured. He remained simply her 'fiancé', her 'beloved'. It is significant that Tilton was abnormally silent about him, given that he had presumably been a central part of her life, and the focal point of her future. Hers was a case of, in Thomson's words, attempting to 'comprehend the jagged edges of experience and compose a bearable past'.²⁹ The way she chose to do so was to deliberately omit her fiancé from her wartime narrative as much as was possible in an effort to ignore the memories of her pain and grief over his death. In other words, she had constructed a narrative that was tolerable for her, yet could still be publicly accepted as an account of one nurse's wartime experiences.

²⁵ Tilton, *The Grey Battalion*, p. 177.

²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 200.

²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 241.

²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 242.

²⁹ Thomson, *Anzac Memories*, p. 312.

Gertrude Moberly chose a different approach to writing about her wartime experiences. Her book is presented as a collection of the letters Moberly wrote to her fiancé, Peter, during the conflict. They are frequent and detailed, covering her service in England, India and on transport duty. They appear to be remarkably honest epistles, and certainly suggest what must have been an open and equal-footed romantic relationship. These letters, however, were not written during the war. Nor was Moberly engaged to Peter during her time on active service. She chose to rewrite her wartime diaries as letters to a fiancé she had not yet met because she believed it would be ‘the simplest method of writing her first book’.³⁰ Like Percy Bird, Moberly was ultimately striving to craft a narrative of her war experiences that highlighted the positive social aspects of her service, and minimised those that were deeply troubling to her.

There is little in Moberly’s letters that describe the unavoidably heartbreaking aspects of her time as a nurse. However, when Moberly does address these issues, her despair is palpable. This is how she described a visit to Sidcup Hospital in 1915:

...there were six hundred men, and not one of them with a whole face. ...
I shall never forget. I was shown photographs of before and after the operations; my stomach turned sick, and I left hurriedly, and as soon as I was out of sight of the building sat by the roadside and cried and cried, for my heart felt like bursting, likewise my head.³¹

Again, in March 1917, there is an element of despair about her work as a nurse. ‘Peter, Peter, Peter!’ she wrote, ‘if I see one more mad boy my heart will snap.’³² It is clear that by this time, the war and the ‘mad boys’ it had caused were haunting her. The reason lay in her brother, Edmund.

Edmund Moberly enlisted in September 1915.³³ At forty-four, he was one year short of the maximum age allowed for the men volunteering. Edmund Moberly’s war was marked by several extended periods in hospital. His bravery and leadership in repairing roads east of Ypres in September 1917 saw him awarded the Military Medal. By March 1918, however, he had been repatriated to Australia and was discharged from the AIF due to ‘premature senility’. A cloaked reference to shellshock, there was no further mention of his physical or

³⁰ Bassett, *As We Wave You Goodbye*, p. xi. Moberly went on to publish further works, mainly fiction.

³¹ Moberly, *Experiences of a ‘Dinki Di’*, p. 32.

³² *ibid.*, p. 53.

³³ NAA Series 2455, File A57578, Edmund William Moberly.

mental health in his records. By 7 July 1925, he was dead. This must have deeply affected Gertrude, and in this, the reason for her particular concern for the ‘mad boys’ eight years later becomes all too apparent. In them she saw (retrospectively) Edmund, her own ‘mad boy’, who made her heart snap.

Thomson argued that time and distance from the war, and the public narrative of Anzac, provided Percy Bird with a framework that allowed him, and other veterans, to articulate their experiences in particular ways.³⁴ That was also the case with Moberly. Her letters place an emphasis on herself as a ‘plucky diggeress’.³⁵ The reference to herself as such appears for the first time in a ‘letter’ written whilst on board the *Orsova*, bound for England in August 1915. This was well before the term digger (and obviously, diggeress) had emerged,³⁶ and it is a telling indication of her post-war reconstruction of this particular memory. As will be discussed in Chapter 4, the nurses adopted aspects of digger behaviour and incorporated it into their own lives and experiences as nurses, as did Moberly in her book. It is indicative of a strong desire on her part to fit within the framework provided by the ‘diggeress’. If the review of her book in the *Women’s Weekly* in 1933³⁷ is any guide, Moberly was actively presenting a narrative that would be publicly accepted. The review praised the book for the insight it offered into the work of a nurse during the Great War.

The emphasis Moberly placed upon interactions between herself and the nurses around her, as well as with the soldiers, is considerable, and similarly falls within the framework of the behaviour of the diggeress. The expectations of the diggeress as a woman who carelessly and freely socialised with the opposite sex gave Moberly the chance to revel in a time of her life when she had an unprecedented and comparatively large amount of social freedom. Thus, in her letters she freely confides in her fiancé about such interactions, admitting and excusing their nature as ‘mild flirtations we all indulge in to keep us sane during these awful years of war, when off duty’.³⁸ But she also used her ‘letters’ to broach the wider issue of the place of women in Australian society, reflecting that period in her life when she was freed from many of the constraints governing women’s behaviour at home.

Why are men supposed to be women’s superiors *re* brains? Why are there two laws – one for the rich, one for the poor? Why may a man sow his wild

³⁴ Thomson, *Anzac Memories*, p. 248.

³⁵ Moberly, *Experiences of a ‘Dinki Di’*, p. 15.

³⁶ Graham Seal dates the widespread use of ‘digger’ from January 1917. Graham Seal, *Inventing Anzac: The Digger and National Mythology*. (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2004), p. 20.

³⁷ *Women’s Weekly*, 15 July 1933, p. 39 (UoW microfilm collection).

³⁸ Moberly, *Experiences of a ‘Dinki Di’*, p. 51.

oats (big fields of them, too, in many cases), and yet go scot free? And yet the naughtiest of men would not care to 'take unto himself a wife', knowing she had been a quarter as naughty as he, and 'le beau monde', would do its damndest to push that (often to be pitied, and 'more sinned against than sinning') female, into the gutter. I have an answer to some of these questions, Pete, and one is: 'because our laws are made by men.'³⁹

These questions suggest Moberly's dissatisfaction with the role and status of women in the post-war world. That women were socially and behaviourally restricted throughout the war cannot be denied, however comparatively speaking, the war also created many times and situations of unprecedented freedom for the nurses. The image and culture of the diggeress was a place in which this independence could be explored and the 'cage' that restricted and controlled women's behaviour, and the gender driven double standards of the day, could be questioned.⁴⁰

³⁹ *ibid.*, p. 87.

⁴⁰ Penny Summerfield and Gail Braybon, *Out of the Cage: Women's Experiences in Two World Wars* (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 2013).

CHAPTER TWO

Wartime Liaisons

The ideal of the wartime romance is a familiar element in popular culture, and as a genre follows a standard set of conventions: boy and girl meet, fall madly and deeply in love, a wartime situation of urgency creates doubt as to the future, but also gives them freedom from the normal constraints associated with courtship, which allows them to marry quickly, after which they are typically separated for an indeterminate length of time. Sometimes they are reunited, at others not.¹ It is a relationship unmistakably defined by its context, as the social conditions created by wartime meant that the time couples had together was fleeting, and the possibility of death was always present. The intensity of the emotions generated by such conditions is a distinctive element of the wartime romance. The dramatic, whirlwind nature of these affairs engendered a sense of fated lovers meant to be together, and the belief that any obstacle could eventually be overcome. While this passion (and the war) justified the hastiness of courtship and marriage, the changes wrought to the middle-class courtship process were significant. As noted by Kate Hunter, the freedom from family involvement in the courtship process allowed 'wider romantic possibilities' to be imagined² yet there was also, at times, a sense of uneasiness about this freedom.

The wartime romance accentuated the contrast between the beauty and happiness found in love, and the desolation and hopelessness of death and war. Such a stark contrast reinforced the idea of the perfection of these relationships. Yet, the stories of Alice Ross King and Olive Haynes suggest that the reality of the wartime romance was often more complex and layered than the conventions of this genre allow. Some women were at times uncomfortable with the fast-paced nature of the wartime courtship, others chafed at the restrictions placed on their courtship. Both have generally been ignored in the more romanticised portrayals of wartime relationships: to do so would disrupt the image of perfection in their love story. Alice Ross King and Olive Haynes are two examples.

¹ See, for example, Lynn Finch, 'Consuming Passions: Romance and Consumerism during World War II' and Kate Darian-Smith, 'Remembering Romance: Memory, Gender and World War II' in Joy Damousi and Marilyn Lake (eds), *Gender and War: Australians at War in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 105-129; Nancy Sloan Goldring, *Woman, Your Hour is Sounding: Continuity and Change in French Women's Great War Fiction* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1999); Ralph Donald, *Women in War Films: From Helpless Heroine to GI Jane* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014); James Chapman, *War and Film* (Trowbridge: Reaktion, 2008).

² Kate Hunter, 'More Than an Archive of War', p. 350.

At one level, the story of Alice Ross King and Harry Moffitt is the classic wartime romance. They met en route to Egypt in August 1915. Alice was returning to Egypt after completing transport duty that had sent her to Australia from Cairo in late June. Harry was embarking on active service for the first time. After meeting Harry, Alice wrote in her diary that she was unsure of 'Lieut Moffat' [sic], and believed that he was 'more interested in Martin [another nurse] than myself'.³ Alice herself was quite taken with 'Montgomery', another soldier on board (even if she also described him as 'a bit of an old woman'),⁴ and was still caught up with thoughts of Australian soldiers she had met in Egypt ('F.S.', 'X' and 'A').⁵ Yet, these were hardly serious matters: when 'F.S.' left for Gallipoli, she had written, 'I'll miss him terribly but my heart is not touched at all'.⁶ Yet, within three weeks and, in the fashion typical of the whirlwind wartime romance, Alice was writing of being 'really & [sic] truly in love' with Harry Moffitt. Theirs, she wrote, was 'a great pure love with none of the old smallness in it'.⁷ In the brevity of their courtship the shadow of the war is evident; the sense of mortality and the partial removal of traditional courtship rituals intensified their feelings, and the need to declare them as soon as possible.

These elements of Alice and Harry's romance form the primary focus of the story as related by Peter Rees in *The Other Anzacs*.⁸ Rees rarely notes the moments when Alice's diary reveals her doubts about Harry and their love. Yet, when Alice first recorded in her diary her love for Harry in September 1915, she had also written, 'He wants me to marry him after the war but I feel I cannot look ahead to then but I am so happy in the present I do not know the man or his character & I do not care I only know that I love him wonderfully & that I am no longer interested in other men. I wonder if this is going to last. It is great. He is the only man in the world for me.'⁹ This simultaneous revelling in, and questioning of, her new love is revealing. It shows how these two seemingly disparate elements can, and did, co-exist in the relationship, and it is Alice's doubts about marrying Harry that shifts their romance beyond the conventions of the archetypal wartime romance. The possibility of Harry being killed, and their future along with it, was high. To make any long-term plans was a futile exercise, and one that a realistic attitude, such as Alice's, would not permit.

³ AWM PRO2082, Alice Ross King, diary entry 30 August 1915.

⁴ *ibid.*, diary entry 13-18 September.

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ *ibid.*, diary entry 3 April 1915.

⁷ *ibid.*, diary entry 13-18 September 1915. (Alice used '&' rather than 'and' and this practice has been retained for quotations from her diaries).

⁸ Rees, *The Other Anzacs*.

⁹ AWM PRO2082, King, diary entry 13 September 1915.

After disembarking in Egypt, the two were inevitably separated. Alice went to No.1 AGH in Cairo whilst Harry went on to the Gallipoli Peninsula. The fact that Alice both loved Harry, yet felt doubt about their relationship, was evident in her diary entries over the following months. For example, in October she wrote, 'He is so sure of my love but I am not of his.'¹⁰ Perhaps she felt that Harry had been toying with her affections. Yet, she could also write that this was 'the great big love at last'.¹¹ And being faithful had its own demands, even temptations. She also wrote that 'It is very hard to keep from flirting with other folk when there are so many about.'¹²

By April 1916, Alice was in France, but Harry's whereabouts were unknown for much of this time. The sporadic and unreliable mail took its toll on Alice (much as it did for the men at the front). She began to feel neglected, even forgotten. On 4 June, she recorded despondently, 'The one I love most evidently can't be bothered writing to me.'¹³ Just over a week later, however, a cable from Harry arrived. 'How different I am tonight', Alice wrote. 'My heart is overflowing with joy & love. That man has my inmost soul.' It was in this entry that she expressed one of the realities of war, one that added to her sense of uncertainty – the fact that Harry might be killed. 'I wonder if I shall have him with me', she wrote, adding, 'I don't know if I want to marry him... but there is no doubt about my love.'¹⁴ Love, then, did not necessarily mean marriage. Rees attributed Alice's reluctance to marry to 'an unconscious self-protective instinct reminding her that nothing in war was certain'.¹⁵ This was undoubtedly a significant factor, but Rees omits one other element that was also relevant. When Alice first declared her love for Harry in her diary, she had also written, as noted above, 'I do not know the man or his character'.¹⁶ Her discomfort, as a proper middle class girl, over flouting a traditionally supervised and leisurely courtship¹⁷ is apparent.

The uncertainty of mail continued to raise doubts for Alice about Harry and their relationship. On 9 July, for example, Alice wrote, 'I cannot think that he wd [sic] so neglect writing to me if he really cared for me. Well I have other offers of love & I don't think I'll sit & fret over

¹⁰ *ibid.*, diary entry 1 October 1915.

¹¹ *ibid.*, diary 14 November 1915.

¹² *ibid.*, diary entry 13 December 1915.

¹³ *ibid.*, diary 4 June 1916.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, diary entry 13 June 1916.

¹⁵ Rees, *The Other Anzacs*, p. 169.

¹⁶ AWM PRO2082, King, diary entry 13-18 September 1915.

¹⁷ See, for example, John R. Gillis, *For Better, For Worse: British Marriages 1600 to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), Jennifer Phegley, *Courtship and Marriage in Victorian England* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2012), chapter 2 and Cas Wouters, *Sex and Manners: Female Emancipation in the West, 1890-2000* (London: Sage Publications Inc.).

any one man. Still it is a blow.’¹⁸ Rees, however, omitted the second sentence in his analysis of the relationship. The omission is a crucial one. The first sentence suggests that Alice was a passive figure in her romance with Harry. The second sentence, however, shows that, rather than remaining a passive figure in a situation where she felt she had been rejected, Alice asserted her own agency instead. She could, and would, find someone else. Shortly after this, Alice received another letter from Harry, one that was ‘full of love’¹⁹ and it restored her confidence in him. It was the last letter she would receive from him. One week later, Alice was informed that Harry had been killed in action at Fromelles on 19 July 1916.

The silence in Alice’s diary for the following ten days says more than any words could and the first entry where she recorded Harry’s death was bleak: ‘Well, my world has ended. Harry is dead. God, what shall I do! ... The future is an absolute blank.’²⁰ Alice’s return to her diary signalled the beginning of the process of working through her grief and bereavement. ‘I expect I must pick up life again & go on’, she wrote. ‘I do not know how to face the lifeless future though. I feel Harry’s presence constantly with me & my love is growing stronger & deeper even since his death. I cannot really believe the news yet & each day I long for a letter telling me he is only wounded. How am I to bear life?’²¹ Her reliance on those around her to help her through this process is evident; she repeatedly wrote of how ‘Millicent is very good to me’, and of her friend, Major John Prior, who took her out on picnics and talked to her of his own family.²² That those she worked with provided her with emotional support is obvious, acting as a surrogate wartime family in helping her deal with Harry’s death.

Alice’s doubts and hesitation about her relationship with Harry suggest how difficult it was for her to completely shed the expectations of a traditional courtship. As Vera Brittain noted in her memoir, *Testament of Youth*, ‘In those days...parents regarded it as a bounden duty to speak their minds at every tentative stage of a developing love-affair’.²³ That was the problem faced by Olive Haynes. She had no doubts that the notions of traditional courtship did not apply in wartime and she was determined to marry an orderly named Pat Dooley. They had met whilst they were both stationed at No.2 ACCS at Trois Arbres. Olive was stationed at the CCS from late August 1916. Pat had been there since April as an orderly. Olive and Pat’s courtship was brief and intense, with the looming possibility of their separation. As that became a more likely possibility towards the end of 1916, Pat received his first mention in a

¹⁸ AWM PRO2082, King, diary entry 9 July 1916.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, diary entry 11 July 1916.

²⁰ *ibid.*, diary entry 29 July 1916.

²¹ *ibid.*, diary entry 4 August 1916.

²² *ibid.*, diary entries 4 and 14 August 1916.

²³ Vera Brittain, Vera. *Testament of Youth: An Autobiographical Study of the Years 1900-1925* (London: Gollancz, 1980), p. 157.

letter home written in December when Olive announced her impending engagement to him. She clearly anticipated objections from her parents because in her December letter she noted, 'We are not keen on getting married until après la guerre, and that might be 20 years.'²⁴

With their daughter on the other side of the world, Olive's parents were completely removed from any power or control over the courtship and marriage of their daughter, and they did object. Over the next twelve months, Olive did her best to convince her parents by giving them details about their plans, but she could not overcome her parents' expectations that they were the ones who should ultimately decide who, and how, she would marry.

In January 1917 the two were separated. Olive was transferred back to No.2 AGH in Boulogne, and Pat was sent to England for further training. Olive summed up her dilemma succinctly. 'He is very anxious that we should get married soon', she wrote. 'I don't know what to do about it. This stunt seems as far off the finish as ever, and the outlook so hopeless. Everyone is urging me on to get married.'²⁵ Although those around her might have been urging Olive to get married, her parents continued to raise objections. An exasperated letter written by Olive to her mother on 18 April 1917 gives an insight into what those objections were:

I got your letter last week telling me you didn't want me to be engaged because you thought I didn't know Pat well enough, and because we would be poor. I did feel upset about it, and then I remembered that probably I hadn't told you that I knew him for five months, lived in the same camp, and saw him every day for that time before we got engaged; and then he is an Australian, so we won't be so far from home and, besides, I know all his pals over here and they just think the world of him. Everyone says how clever he is – he was the cleverest in his year at Melb. Varsity. Anyhow, you've always been telling me that you wished I would get married, and then when I find the right man you don't like it. We can wait.²⁶

Without the parents' letters one cannot be certain, yet from Olive's replies to their objections gives a good indication of what they were. They included the short time she had known Pat,

²⁴ Haynes, *We are Here Too*, p.176.

²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 180.

²⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 200-201, 216-216.

their uncertain future financially, the potential separation of their daughter from them because of distance and the fact that her parents had yet to meet him.

By June 1917, Pat had been promoted to second lieutenant and was transferred to the front. Olive had made no mention of marriage to her parents since her terse letter in April. With Pat's transfer, she raised the issue again.

I know you all think we shouldn't, but you must see it from our point of view. Mine is that, if anything happened to Pat, I would never forgive myself for not having done what he wanted, and you just have to face things out here... we see so many go out and never come back. It is with us all the time.²⁷

She added that these were not 'like ordinary times, when I would consider all the things you are considering'. In October 1917, Pat was severely wounded at Broodseinde, suffering a gunshot wound to his chest. Faced with the possibility of Pat's death, parental disapproval now mattered little to Olive: two months later, on 11 December 1917, Olive and Pat married.

Lucy May Pitman's relationship with a British soldier, Billy, presents an entirely different view of a wartime liaison. To date, the focus has been on the wartime romance from the woman's perspective. Billy's letters to May narrate the story of their relationship from his point of view. Through his letters, a darker side emerges.

May and Billy met whilst they were both on leave in Cairo in mid-1917, where they spent several days in each other's company. Their correspondence appears to have begun not long after with two letters from May; Billy replied on 8 August 1917. The beginning of his letter was hopeful and affectionate, remembering

The pleasant memories of the happy time spent with you will never fade, and I look forward hopefully to the future when we shall meet again. Till then I shall count the days & even the hours. I have been longing to write to you and now I scarcely know how, or dare, to express all my thoughts.²⁸

Yet as his letter continued, his tone shifted: 'I should like so much to make a great pal of you, one to whom I can write freely. ... I do not want you to forget me, dear, or even make pals

²⁷ *ibid.*, 215-216

²⁸ AWM PRO3277, Lucy May Pitman, letter 8 August 1917.

with anyone else, at least not great pals. Do I expect too much?'.²⁹ Billy's possessiveness is plain and the letter showed a complete disregard for the polite and restrained progression of a traditional courtship; yet in the absence of May's letters to Billy, how she reacted to this particular transgression remains unknown. Billy's next letter to May, written four days later, was markedly jealous:

I must confess dear that I felt frightfully jealous of the Australian Officer who accompanied you to Luna Park, but I console myself with the thought that you were only a little pally with him, or just friendly. You must think I am rather a strange, if not a most forward individual, to write in this strain, but unfortunately I must write what I think or not write at all.³⁰

Billy's jealousy conflicts with the ideal of the wartime romance. While his feelings for May were passionate, as expected in the typical wartime romance, they were possibly too much so. 'You are the only real pal I have', Billy wrote on 31 August, 'and I have so far, tried to persuade myself that I am the only pal you have'.³¹ Billy was clearly smitten with May, yet his letters have an obsessive quality to them along with a sense of ownership. His jealousy was undoubtedly exacerbated by their separation; he clearly believed the possibility of May having other 'great pals' was very real if he was not around. 'I do not like the thought of being one of a number', he wrote.³²

In a letter written a week later, Billy's tone had changed; it appeared his jealousy had subsided. Instead, his thoughts were consumed with memories of when he and May had met in Cairo, which he referred to as their 'honeymoon'.³³ To refer to the time they had spent together – only a few fleeting, and presumably, chaperoned days – in such a suggestive and intimate manner broke with any pretence of following the appropriate behaviour befitting an acceptable courtship. Taken alone, Billy's reference to their 'honeymoon' could be considered a romantic gesture, and a sign of his affection, yet when placed within the broader context of his letters, which were marked by jealousy and possessiveness, it takes on an entirely different meaning. The letters that followed over the next month continued in the same vein. He

²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 2.

³⁰ *ibid.*, letter 12 August 1917.

³¹ *ibid.*, letter 31 August 1917, p. 2.

³² *ibid.*, p. 3.

³³ *ibid.*, letter 6 September 1917, p. 2.

badgered May to obtain leave to coincide with his and added a sexual allusion: 'you are long overdue for your honeymoon'.³⁴

The last letter from Billy to May was dated 25 November 1917, and only the first page remains. In it, Billy described how he was 'eagerly waiting for the order to move on' from Palestine, presumably to Cairo and therefore closer to May. Whether Billy and May ever did reunite in Cairo for their 'honeymoon', whether the correspondence continued, or even if Billy survived the war, is unknown. Similarly, without any of May's letters to Billy, how she felt about him and how she responded to the intensity of his feelings for her cannot even be guessed at. Yet what Billy's letters to May suggest are the changes wrought by wartime to the manners and etiquette governing courtship. Billy had no time for a leisurely courtship, was forthright in his intentions towards May and was jealous. While such behaviour was undoubtedly reflective of Billy's personality, it is also reasonable to assume the effect of the war and the possibility of death contributed to his apparent disregard for what was considered socially acceptable. Such a relationship has rarely been included in popular portrayals of the wartime romance. Billy and May's relationship, however, suggests that wartime romances could be obsessive, jealous interactions.

If stories like Lucy May Pitman's are less well known in the literature examining Australian nurses and wartime romance, so, too, is flirting. Yet Alice Ross King certainly recorded her flirting before she met Harry. She was not alone. Gertrude Moberly, for example, declared that 'these little "affaires d'amour" keep one from going blue mouldy'.³⁵ And flirting between soldiers and nurses was certainly far more common than the more serious relationships discussed to date.

Sister Bertish and Mary Inger's autograph books provide an insight into the flirtations that occurred between the soldiers and nurses within the hospital ward. As a medium of communication, the autograph book was a place where soldiers could articulate their thoughts, feelings and memories before they left the safety of the hospital, and the comfort found in the care of the nurses. In doing so, they invariably constructed 'a vivid map of personal networks' which highlighted the intimacy and variety of the interactions between these men and women.³⁶ The messages written for Bertish and Inger ranged from the teasing and good-natured, to the openly flirtatious, even the bitter.

³⁴ *ibid.*, letter 12 October 1917.

³⁵ Moberly, *The Experiences of a 'Dinki Di' R.R.C Nurse*, p. 51

³⁶ Santanu Das, *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature*, p. 178.

The majority of the examples of flirting found in Bertish and Inger's autograph books are light-hearted and teasing. They were written in fun, even if the content was at times suggestive. Private Arthur Vernon George wrote the following poem for Sister Bertish during his stay at Bishops Knoll Hospital.

In the parlour there were three –
He the parlour lamp and she.
Two is company no doubt.
That is why the lamp went out.³⁷

Other poems were far more direct, and the undercurrent of sexual attraction that drives flirtatious exchanges was clearly evident, like the following in Inger's autograph book.

There she goes, there she goes,
All dressed up in her sunday clothes
Nobody knows, nobody knows,
Whether she wears any underclothes.³⁸

This is a far cheekier entry than George's, and is indicative of not only the author himself, but also of the fact that he knew that such bawdiness would not necessarily offend Inger.

Other entries indicated that some of the men were rather smitten with their carers. The following entry by R.L. is good-natured. However, it is difficult to ignore the suggestion evident in the text that he may also have entertained hopes for something more than friendship. He wrote:

A smile you may give unto many,
Of friendship it is but part.
But give not a kiss unto any,
That holds not the love your heart.³⁹

Flirting also had the potential to be driven by an unreciprocated infatuation. The following is an example of the darker side of flirting, much like Billy and May's relationship is for the wartime romance. It is cryptically signed 'From one you know well', and, unlike many of the

³⁷ AWM PRO0794, A. Bertish.

³⁸ AWM PR84/118, Mary Inger. The autograph was signed but the signature was indecipherable.

³⁹ *ibid.*

entries in Bertish's books, all identifying details are absent. Although we do not know the context for the entry, it is clear that in some way or another, Bertish had rejected the author. The entry has a bitter tone:

Many a girl is on the
shelf today for keeping
a man on the rack yesterday.
From one you know well.⁴⁰

Santanu Das has argued that the variety of messages within the autograph book provide a 'vivid map of personal networks' and that they can range from the formal to the sentimental and risqué.⁴¹ They also offer a fuller picture of the nurse for whom they were written because they capture a view of the women, and their work, as they were seen by others. In the case of Bertish and Inger, an easy familiarity with their patients was clearly part of their approach to nursing. They clearly created an atmosphere in which the soldiers felt they could safely engage with the nurses in sometimes risqué ways, without risk of causing offence.

Laura Grubb and Dave Sharpie's relationship does not fall neatly into either the wartime romance or flirting categories. Grubb was stationed at 42nd General Hospital in Salonika. Sharpie was a patient. A talented water colourist, he created a set of cards and other mementoes for Grubb, a record of their relationship whilst he was a patient. She kept them and later donated them to the Australian War Memorial. Katie Holmes has argued that their relationship was a sexual one, using one of Sharpie's sketches ('The Late Night Sister – or "Eve"') as evidence (see Figure 2.1).⁴²

Figure 2.1: The Late Night-Sister: or – 'Eve'.

However, this has ignored the fact that the collection reflects a more complex relationship than that, one that may have been fostered by the geographical isolation of the hospitals in Salonika. There, the line between professional interactions within the hospital ward, and relationships formed within a social context, could be a blurred one. The relationship between Laura Grubb and Sharpie appears to have existed in both spheres.

⁴⁰ AWM PRO0794, Bertish.

⁴¹ Das, *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature*, p. 178.

⁴² Katie Holmes, 'Day Mothers and Night Sisters: World War I Nurses and Sexuality', in Damousi and Lake (eds), *Gender and War*, pp. 43-59.

The poems and sketches Sharpie wrote and drew for Grubb are numerous, and vary in their manner. Some, like the one titled ‘Dinkums & RAFs’ or ‘The Makedons’ depict the larrikin-esque doings of a couple of mates who ‘pinched Johnny’s donk’, & paid with a smile’. Others like ‘Peaches - and Custard’ are full of sexual innuendo:

So Sisters if you have your eye
On a nice “Sam Browne” – try custard;
But do make sure, that while he “spooned”
He hasn’t really “cussed hard”.

Now ladies, if you’re clever
And make this custard “slick”
Just find some tea - and a shady tree
And that Sam Browne you’ll “click”.⁴³

Given such bold content, it would be all too easy to assume that the relationship between Sharpie and Grubb was an intimate one. Sharpie’s suggestion of time alone (‘Free from Matron’s Eye’), and of the ‘Saucy Girl’ whose lips were ‘Wanting smacked’ in another untitled poem is also unmistakably sexual.

Yet the card titled ‘Concert 63’ is more teasing, playful and flirtatious (see Figure 2.2). It shows a nurse singing from a score that reads, ‘I want someone to cuddle me’. The nurse in the foreground is presumably Grubb. The back of the card cheekily notes, ‘Good-night’. Yet there is ambiguity in the card. Grubb could be singing, or could be shocked by the contents of the score. ‘Good-night’ itself could simply mean the concert had provided a good night’s entertainment or could be seen as a slightly suggestive and inappropriate expression of his own feelings and dreams. It is quite possible that this was Sharpie indulging in his own sexual fantasy of Grubb.

Figure 2.2: Concert 63.

Another card depicts a child-like figure in the garb of a nurse (see Figure 2.3).

⁴³ AWM PR83/040, Laura Grubb.

Figure 2.3: To Sister L. Grubb.

The message of thanks Sharpie wrote for Grubb here is clearly platonic. It is likely that Sharpie gave this to Grubb upon his discharge from hospital and from her care; therefore, after they had known each other for some time. In this context, it can be seen as a return from his fantasies of her to reality. 'To wish you all that's bright & blest, Both Fortune's gifts & Friendship's treasure' was a fairly standard message in such a situation. However, this adherence to the norm is an important one to remember; when all was said and done, Sharpie was acknowledging that he had been the patient, and friend, of his nurse.

The exact nature of the relationship between Grubb and Sharpie can never be known. Certainly, Grubb did not volunteer any explanation when she donated the material to the Australian War Memorial. The material in the collection ranges from the humorous and larrikin, to the teasing and flirtatious and, clearly on Sharpie's part, sexual attraction and a convalescing patient indulging in his own daydreams of love and lust, rather than war and death. Above all, though, it shows that, like many of the relationships described in this chapter, the relationship between nurse and patient was never static.

CHAPTER THREE

Sisters and Confidantes

The years of training required to qualify as a registered nurse, and to enlist in the AANS, meant that the majority of the nurses were older than many of the soldiers they treated. This naturally lent itself to the nurse being seen, and often acting as, as an older sister figure. The nurses' title of 'Sister', although used long before the war, became a symbolic term reflective of this dynamic. This was particularly pertinent during the war as they were single women living and working in a predominantly masculine environment.

Yet for many of the nurses, it was a literal term as well as a symbolic one, as many had brothers who were soldiers in the AIF. It was often the enlistment of a brother that motivated them to volunteer their nursing services in the first place: to 'look after' or 'keep an eye on' him. This certainly seemed to be the case for Katie Rees, who at the age of thirty-three, enlisted on 14 July 1915, at the same time as her twenty-one year old brother Billy.¹ The desire to be close by a brother was an understandable one, as it meant the potential to care for him was possible. However, the opportunity to do so was rare, and depended upon where each was stationed.

Many of the nurses also tended to see their own loved ones in the men they treated. In projecting the love they felt for their own family members onto the men under their care, the way they viewed the war was altered. It became more personal. This is reflected in the lengths they often went to in treating their patients, both physically and emotionally. It transformed the often brief and transient connections to their patients to something more concrete and meaningful – to that of a surrogate, wartime family. The nature of nursing during the war was therefore, for many, tightly bound up in sisterly ties, both actual and surrogate.

Sisters

Elsie Grant's letter to her friend Rose, written in late August 1917, demonstrates the significance of the dual sisterly ties that came with her war service. The experience of being shelled and evacuated from No.3 ACCS at Braenhoek in Belgium to a small French village was a traumatic one. Writing only a day after this evacuation, it is clear that Elsie was lost amidst a whirlwind of shock and fear. Her sentences are sparingly punctuated, and run in a

¹ AWM PRO3283, Rees, Wilfred Benjamin (Sapper), 1893-1987; Rees, James R (Jim) (Private); Rees, Katie (Kate) (Sister); Pawley (nee Rees), Clara 'Farley'.

long, rambling manner, no doubt mirroring her train of thought at the time. Elsie's distress over having had to temporarily abandon her patients during the shelling is obvious:

...we have been shelled out three times but this last time was too dreadful those brutal Germans deliberately shell our hospital with all our poor helpless boys. but really God was good to us we had four killed but it was just miraculous that there were not dozens killed of course we (the Sisters) were put into dugouts as soon as the shelling got bad but I can't tell you how cruel it was to leave those poor helpless patients.²

She then moved on to the serendipitous reunion with her older brother Allan. It was a 'strange' coincidence, she wrote, that she was evacuated to the same town that Allan had been sent to only two hours earlier. The joy and relief she found in his presence is reflected in her writing: '...when the car stopped the first person I put eyes on was Allan really I thought to myself God must have sent him as a comfort after the day we had had we all embraced him & the dear left at 5 a.m. next morning...'³ Seeing Allan at such a time was a desperately needed miracle. After describing Allan's departure, her letter returned to the shelling of the CCS and although the deaths of the four men still troubled her, the emphasis had shifted. What she now wrote dwelt on the support she and the other nurses received from the soldiers around them: 'Rose if you could only have seen the Australian boys the day we were shelled so badly they came from far & near to see if we were alright.'⁴ In these men, it seems that Elsie found her wartime surrogate family; in them, she saw her brother. At the end of her letter Elsie admitted, 'I want ever so badly to come home on transport but I really can't bring myself to leave Allan behind. That is the principle reason I don't come.'⁵

Two months later, Elsie received a letter from the sergeant of Allan's company. Her brother had been killed in action in Belgium on 12 October 1917; their fortuitous meeting behind the lines in France was their last one. In his letter, Sergeant Carey strove to provide what comfort he could to Elsie, writing of how Allan '...was so jolly; full of sport; & good natured that he was soon known & loved by all the boys, in fact his platoon used to just idolise him...'⁶ Yet little to no information was included on how he had been killed or if he was buried, details that were frequently sought by the next of kin because they confirmed the fact of death and that the

² AWM PRO0596, Elsie Rose Grant, letter 23 August 1917.

³ *ibid.*

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ *ibid.*, letter from Sgt N. S. Carey, 20 October 1917.

rituals surrounding death had been observed.⁷ As a nurse, Elsie would have known what this particular lack of detail probably meant – that no one knew. It was not until early 1919 that the specific details of Allan’s death were established. Allan was reported as having been shot in the head whilst attacking a German pillbox on Belle Vue Spur, east of Ravebeek. Death was also reported as instantaneous, although his place of burial was still unknown at that time. The letters in Allan’s service record show that he was the sole support for his widowed and unwell mother; she questioned the delay in receiving his deferred pay, pleading ‘I am a heartbroken mother’.⁸ Elsie resigned from her post in the AANS in April 1918, for ‘private family reasons’;⁹ it is a safe assumption that her grief played a part in this decision, along with the declining health of her mother. Elsie’s mother was dead by early 1919. Elsie went on to marry and have four children. However, on 25 September 1927, at the age of thirty-seven, she committed suicide.¹⁰

A letter from Maud Ashdown to her brother Ernest similarly demonstrates the importance of close sibling relationships when it came to coping with the trauma of war and death. By November 1915, Maud and her four brothers had all enlisted. The letter in question was written from Choubra Hospital in Cairo in late August 1916 to her brother Ernest, expressing her grief over the death of their youngest brother, Cecil, who had been killed in action on 20 July 1916 during the Battle of Fromelles. Cecil was nineteen. ‘What can I say to you darling boy to give you all some comfort’, she wrote. ‘Our darling Baby Boy’s death has been one huge blow and will make such a huge gap in our lives and poor old Mother she I know will be well nigh heartbroken.’¹¹ As a nurse Maud was constantly faced with the death of her patients, yet in this letter she was providing, and seeking, comfort in a shared grief. The familiar reassurances in many letters like this are there: ‘Cecil died a hero fighting hard for our country’,¹² she wrote, an attempt, perhaps, to convince herself that the loss of their ‘Baby Boy’ was not a meaningless or pointless one. Yet Maud was also writing to someone who had experienced war first hand. Ernest had fought on the Gallipoli Peninsula and was repatriated

⁷ See Jen Hawksley, ‘“In the Shadow of the War”: Australian Parents and the Legacy of Loss, 1915-1935’. *Journal of Australian Studies*, vol. 33, no. 2 (2009) pp. 181-94; Joy Damousi, *The Labour of Loss: Mourning, Memory and Wartime Bereavement in Australia* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Pat Jalland, *Australian Ways of Death: A Social and Cultural History 1840-1918* (South Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2002); Pat Jalland, *Changing Ways of Death in Twentieth Century Australia: War, Medicine and the Funeral Business* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2006); Bart Zino, *A Distant Grief: Australian War Graves and the Great War* (Crawley WA: University of Western Australia Press, 2007).

⁸ NAA Series 2455, File Z1750, Allan Grant

⁹ NAA Series 2455, Elsie Rose Grant.

¹⁰ Rae, *Veiled Lives*, p. 323.

¹¹ Maud Ashdown in AWM 2DRL/0286, Cecil Parker Ashdown.

¹² *ibid.*

because of the severity of his wound.¹³ There was no hiding behind carefully chosen words, and no recourse to the oft-repeated assurance in so many letters that the man's death had been instantaneous and painless.

Maud, however, had another motive in writing to her repatriated brother: dissuading him from re-enlisting. 'Pal my darling I want you to stay at home now', she wrote, 'you have done your share and now try and stay with darling old Mother.'¹⁴ Maud's concern for their mother, as well as Ernest, is palpable. With two other brothers, Clive and Edmond, still at the front, she was well aware of the toll that that was having on her mother. In March 1917, Maud's service with the AANS ended when she married. The following month, Edmond was killed in action near Bullecourt. Clive survived the war and returned home. Ernest did not re-enlist.¹⁵

Family was also important to Agnes Jones. Her brother, Archie (known in the family as 'Micky') enlisted on 17 July 1915, and Agnes followed over a year later. By 1917, they were both stationed on the Western Front. In May, she wrote home about the 'heart scalding' nature of the war,¹⁶ suggesting that the dead were better off than those still alive and fighting. Although a seemingly inverted perspective, it captured the contradictory and emotional perils of nursing in the war: these women often saw men brought into their wards who were so seriously wounded that they could do little for them. She caught up with her brother in October 1917. 'He is just as fat as ever', she wrote, 'and looks bright and cheerful. He had supper with me every night while here, and occasionally we went into town for dinner. "Micky" has gone into the line again. It was lovely having him here for 10 days.'¹⁷ The terseness of those two lines reflects both her joy in meeting up with her brother, and the unspoken fear that his return to the line held his potential death.

Like Elsie Grant, Agnes translated her concern for her brother onto the men she nursed. 'We have had a few more Australians than previously in', she wrote, 'and they are always a welcome lot.'¹⁸ The Australians also welcomed being nursed by their own countrywomen. As Harris argued, the red cape of the AANS nurses' uniform came to signify the presence of fellow Australians to the men.¹⁹ It was all that was needed for introductions to be made. 'They think they have struck heaven when they get to us among their own people', Agnes

¹³ NAA Series 2455, File A7530, Ashdown, Ernest Edwin.

¹⁴ Maud Ashdown in AWM 2DRL/0286, Cecil Parker Ashdown.

¹⁵ NAA Series 2455, File A7530, Ernest Edwin Ashdown; File D24656, Edmond Arthur Ashdown; File A71735 Clive Ashdown; File D21994, Cecil Parker Ashdown.

¹⁶ Agnes Jones, letter May 1917.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, letters 7 and 26 October 1917.

¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹ Harris, *More Than Bombs and Bandages*, p. 132.

wrote, adding that their 'first question always is, "What State do you come from, Sister?"'²⁰ The comfort and relief found by the Australian soldiers in the simple knowledge of being tended to by an Australian nurse, or being in an Australian hospital, is indicative of the bond created by a shared longing for their faraway home, and the existence of a surrogate family.

Because, as noted earlier, many of the nurses were older than their patients, the role of the older sister was a natural one for the nurses to assume, and, like Agnes' unwritten fear about Archie's return to the front line, there was a protective element in that role. Yet, even when the nurses were closer to the ages of their patients, the tone of a much older sister prevailed when describing their patients. For example, Lettitia Gladys Moreton was twenty-four when she nursed Australian men wounded on the Gallipoli Peninsula during the August Offensive in 1915. The protective element was evident when she wrote, 'I never want to see any of the wounded ones go back again, they have done their wack.'²¹ Such protectiveness was a natural sentiment for a 'sister' looking after a younger brother. Moreton was also preoccupied with the youth of the soldiers being admitted to her ward, writing, 'They all wear short trousers above the knees here and that makes them look younger, I think. One little fellow the other day looked about 16 but he was 20. We have them 18 and 19 though.'²² Twenty-four she may have been, but her tone is certainly that of an older sister.

Assuming the role of a 'sister' was also a simple and comparatively innocent mode of interacting with their 'brothers'. It removed the moral ambiguity surrounding the interactions of men and women in such close proximity as the hospital ward, as it 'downplayed the sexual dimension inherent in it'.²³ The roles of both the nurse and patient were clearly defined within the confines of the hospital: the patient, although male, was under the charge of the nurse, whose job it was to care for, and nurture, her patient back to health. This was a more acceptable and comfortable way of dealing with this temporary inversion of power. This dynamic also, according to Holmes, allowed the patient's masculinity to be restored via the nurse's emphasis upon his heroism.²⁴ What Holmes and others, however, have overlooked is that this process also involved collusion, a sense of humour and a tolerance of the behaviour of men on the road to recovery.

Men on the road to recovery (and usually a return to the front) tended to be absent without leave (AWL). How many men went AWL whilst recovering remains unknown, but the

²⁰ Agnes Jones, letters 7 and 26 October 1917.

²¹ AWM 2DRL/0097, Lettitia Gladys Moreton, letter 6 August 1915.

²² *ibid.*

²³ Damousi and Lake, *Gender and War*, p. 8.

²⁴ Holmes, 'Day Mothers and Night Sisters', p. 48.

practice was common enough to warrant comment from the doctors. What they probably did not know was that some nurses refused to report the absconders. Anne Donnell was one. 'I have never reported a digger yet for being A.W.L., and I never shall', she wrote – and she explained why. 'One knows there must be rules and discipline in the management of a Hospital, but just think for a moment what these boys have done for us, and matters such as these vanish immediately.'²⁵ The lengths the nurses would often go to, as 'sisters' protecting their wayward 'brothers' is apparent, as the cooperation of Anne's fellow nurses in disguising the absence of the truanting soldier showed:

When I was over at the Home having my midnight meal, a Day Sister who had a late pass, and had just come home, said to me, 'Sister, I've just seen one of your boys safely to the ward; a fine handsome boy too, who has been celebrating his four years of soldiering. He's a bit merry, so Sister T. and I made him come into our Ambulance, and we were able to hide him when we passed the M.P. at the gate.'²⁶

Letitia Moreton's indulgence of her patients' antics demonstrated a sense of humour and an acceptance that the men needed harmless fun and laughter as part of their recovery process. She described one such incident and it is clear that she enjoyed the practical joke as much as the perpetrators:

While the Concert was on one of my boy friends put a little donkey in one of my Patients' beds and went for me and told me there was a new patient who needed attention at once so off I went along and when I saw this thing lying there blinking its eye I thought it must be one of the boys in Wolf's clothing, never dreaming that a little animal would lie there like that and when I saw it, we did laugh. It was a good joke so I left it there until the boys came back from the Concert and you should have heard them laughing and running for me to see the fun, so I did not let on that I had left it there. It was 2 am before anyone settled down to sleep.²⁷

According to the regulations, she should have reported an incident. She chose not to.

²⁵ Anne Donnell, *Letters of an Australian Army Sister* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1920), pp. 258-60.

²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 260.

²⁷ AWM 2DRL/0097, Moreton, letter 29/4/16

Such attention to the morale of the men, and even accepting skylarking on their part, was not uncommon amongst the nurses. Nor was it merely a sideshow to the more important procedures of physically tending to the wounds and illnesses of the men. Christine Hallett has described this as ‘emotional containment’, wherein the nurses played a pivotal role in helping the soldiers cope with the memories of, and emotions associated with, their experiences in the trenches. The nurses listened to their patients’ talk, therefore ‘enabling them to make sense of, and even normalise their often-outrageous experiences’.²⁸ To do so required a certain level of trust between them; trust that was undoubtedly present in these surrogate sibling relationships. The sibling bond was a safe and comforting one, and the root of that bond was in shared experiences stemming from the trauma of war. While the time invested in the development of these bonds was often brief, the deeply personal sentiments often entrusted to the nurses by their patients suggests the very real need on the part of the soldiers for such an outlet. That meant that as part of the healing process, nurses also filled the role of confidante.

Confidantes

The transitory nature of the patient-nurse experience gave some men a sense of freedom to confide in women they would probably never meet again. We can never know what was said, of course, but the autograph books kept by Sisters Bertish and Inger, introduced in the previous chapter, offer an insight into the role of nurses as confidante. The ways in which the soldiers expressed themselves was reflective of their personalities and their experiences of the war. What was written was often intimate, a mixture of fears, hopes, honesty and vulnerabilities, along with a sense of the authors’ own mortality.

For the soldiers, the thought of death – of their own, or their friends’ – was inescapable. The writings in Bertish and Inger’s autograph books show how these men were clearly attempting to come to terms with the very real possibility of no future for themselves, and what this would mean. For Watson, an Australian soldier in London War Hospital, family and the need to affirm love for loved ones was the primary consideration:

If you’ve a tender message
Or a loving word to say
Don’t wait till you forget it,
But whisper it to-day.
Who knows what bitter memories

²⁸ Christine E. Hallett, *Containing Trauma*, pp. 158-159.

May haunt you if you wait?
So make your loved ones happy
Before it is too late.
We live but in the present,
The future is unknown;
To-morrow is a mystery,
Today is all our own.
The chance that future binds to us
May vanish while we wait;
We should give our richest treasure
Before it is too late.²⁹

Watson's sense of his own future, or lack thereof, filters through the poem. His words suggest his resignation to this possibility, however his focus is on the loved ones he would leave behind, and on encouraging messages of love to be shared now rather than later, if not for your own sake, then for theirs. The sense that this was a man who loved deeply and simply, and had much of it to lose, is there.

Private Jack Davies, in his entry written on 15 July 1916 in Bishops Knoll Hospital, expressed a simple desire to be remembered:

When this you see remember me and bear me in your mind
let al [sic] the world say what they may speak of me as you find.
When I am dead and in my grave and all my bones are rotten
this little book will tell my name
when I am quite forgotten.³⁰

In Davies' realisation of his mortality is the need to tangibly record part of himself before he returned to the battlefield. Yet underpinning this is an element of cynicism, a belief that he would be forgotten, except for his doggerel and his name in 'this little book'. The nature of a war of attrition and the anonymity of large-scale death no doubt contributed to this attitude, along with a sense of futility. After one year on active service, Davies was jaded and weary. Death was not just a possibility, it was all but guaranteed.

²⁹ AWM PR84/118, Inger.

³⁰ AWM PRO0794, Bertish.

Private William Thompson used the genre of bush poetry to express his feelings. His entry was most likely written during April 1917. Addressed to Sister Bertish, with thanks ‘for her kindness and attention’ during his time at Bishops Knoll, it read:

The boy ran away to the city from his home at Christmas time
They were Scots of the Riverina, and to run from home was a crime.
The old man burned his letters, the first and the last he burned.
And he scratched his name from the Bible when the old woman [sic] back
was turned.
A year went past and another, and the fruit went down the line.
They heard the boy had enlisted, and the old man made no sign.
His name must never be mentioned, on the farm by Gundagai.
They were the Scots of the Riverina, with ever the kirk hard by.
The boy came home on his “final” and the township’s bonfire burned
His mother’s arms were about him, but the old man’s back was turned.
The daughters begged for pardon, till the old man raised his hand –
A Scot of the Riverina was hard to understand
The boy was killed in Flanders, where the bravest heroes die
There were tears at the Graham Homestead and grief at Gundagai
But the old man ploughed at daybreak, and the old man ploughed t’ the
mirk
There were furrows of pain in the orchard while his house-folk went to
the kirk.
The hurricane lamp in the rafters dimly and dimly burned.
And the old man died at the table, when the old woman’s back was
turned.
Face down on his bare arms folded he sank, with his wild grey hair
Outspread o’er the open Bible, and a name re-written there³¹

The story in Thompson’s poem is rich in its detail and feeling. It is clear that he spent some time composing it; but was he telling his own story?

William Thompson, in fact, was an assumed name: the soldier’s true name was Francis Pickard.³² The story that unfolds in his service record suggests that he was telling his story in a form that allowed him some distance by using the third voice in a familiar genre, allowing

³¹ *ibid.*

³² NAA Series 2455, File A59696, Francis Pickard.

him to invent and, perhaps, to hope. Thompson came from a country town in the Central West of New South Wales. He was estranged from his family. According to one of his sisters, Rose, he had left home five years before enlisting on 25 February 1916, but had returned home on his final leave. After several months in the front line, on 12 March 1917, he was wounded in action on the Somme, suffering a severe gunshot wound to his left leg. Over a month later he was transferred to the 2nd Southern General Hospital, Bishops Knoll, in Bristol. He remained there until late November 1917. It was during this time that he wrote the poem, and signed a statutory declaration stating his true identity to be Francis Pickard. His reasons for doing so, and for enlisting under the alias of William Thompson, remain unknown.

The poem, of course, is not purely autobiographical. Thompson did not die in Flanders. He did not come from Gundagai. Yet many of the other elements in the poem do reflect his own life, and the poem expresses a hope: in it, the boy and the father are reconciled in death. This may well be Thompson giving voice to his greatest wish: the forgiveness of his father. Whether Thompson saw himself as the Prodigal Son and wrote the poem as a form of catharsis can only be a matter of speculation. The service record does, however, show that some form of reconciliation did take place. His father, in a statutory declaration, acknowledged Thompson as his son. The file also records, almost in passing, that Thompson's younger brother, Patrick, had been killed in action in June 1917.

The fact that these men would reveal such personal feelings to the nurses is not surprising: the nurse had been with them at the time they were at their most vulnerable, and became their confidantes.

CHAPTER FOUR

Mothers, Moral Police and 'Diggeresses'

To date, this thesis has examined different aspects of the multi-faceted nature of the relationships between soldiers and nurses during the Great War. This chapter further explores aspects of those relationships, reflecting the fact that, as noted in Chapter 2, the roles the women filled were never static but changed as circumstances and individual temperament came into play. This chapter concludes that analysis by examining how nurses filled the roles of mothers and moral police before briefly examining the way the nurses appropriated aspects of digger behaviour, in itself a reflection of the fact that the men and women believed that the war itself was a shared experience.

Mothers

Given the nurturing role of the nurse in treating her patients, the assumption of a maternal role by some of the nurses was a natural one, and was clearly evident in the language they used when discussing their patients. Agnes Jones, for example, described them this way: 'They are all just babies when it comes to home. I feel quite maternal at times, one gets to love them.'¹ As patients, the soldiers were vulnerable and fresh from extreme situations of fear and danger, and at such times it was a natural instinct to want to return to the earliest relationship of their lives.² As a mother figure, the nurse was able to temporarily fill the gap created when the men left home and their mothers were far away. Often this was as simple as sitting by their bedsides to listen and talk. As May Tilton observed, 'There was so much they wanted to tell us, and it hurt to give them so little attention when they needed so much.'³

The literature discussing the nurses' role as mothers has been couched in terms of the boundaries this established in the relationship between nurse and patient. Holmes in particular has argued that assuming the role of a mother was a deliberate move by the nurses. As 'mothers', they were able to 'eschew their sexuality', and ensure that their patients were 'wounded, emasculated men'.⁴ Janet Butler has argued that the nurses acted the mother as a way of safely negotiating the nurse-patient relationship.⁵ However, the fact that nurses

¹ Agnes Jones, letters 7 and 26 October 1917.

² Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle*, p. 3.

³ Tilton, *The Grey Battalion*, p. 184.

⁴ Holmes, 'Day Mothers and Night Sisters', pp. 46-47.

⁵ Janet Butler, *Kitty's War: The Remarkable Experiences of Kit McNaughton* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2013), p. 75.

stepped into a surrogate maternal role can also be seen as a natural dynamic in the nurse-patient relationship, reflecting prevailing values. The nurses were nurturers and carers, the role popularly assigned to women, and especially, mothers at that time. And the fact that they were often confronted with death added poignancy to the role. Olive Haynes, writing home in September 1916 reflected this. ‘They call dying, “going west”’, she wrote, ‘and it’s so pathetic when they ask, “Sister, do you think I am going west?”’ When writing about some of her Scottish patients, her letter also reflected a sense of helplessness: ‘Some of the baby Jocks (as we call them) are only 16 or 17 – it is so sad to see them die. They are plucky little boys. You’d give anything or do anything to save them.’⁶ To Olive, these scared and dying men were ‘little boys’. She was not alone in seeing them as such.

Although Agnes Cullen Jones played the part of sister as discussed in Chapter 2, as the quotation given earlier in this chapter indicates, she also stepped into a motherly role for her patients. Like Olive, she was quite inclusive in her maternal feelings for them. For example, she saw no real difference between the British and Australian soldiers. ‘Tommies and all, they are all such tricks, and regard our marquees and tents as paradise. They sigh a great sigh of content I can tell you when they snuggle down into their beds.’ She added, ‘The English boys are very fond of the Australian sisters. It makes a great bond of fellowship between the colonies and the old country, and we are very fond of these boys.’⁷ Agnes’ mothering was inclusive enough to include German prisoners who became her patients. ‘They are only children some of them’, she wrote, ‘and as much as we hate their nation, we cannot hate the individual boy, and strange to say, the boys don’t either. Back here they are very tolerant with them.’⁸ Vera Brittain wrote similarly of her German prisoner of war patients, writing, ‘One of the things I like best to remember about the War is the nonchalance with which the Sisters and V.A.D.s in the German ward took for granted that it was they who must be overworked, rather than the prisoners neglected.’⁹ It mattered little that they were the ‘enemy’: both Jones and Brittain viewed them more as victims of war, a fate they shared with the Australian and British soldiers.

For some nurses, their age gave them the authority of a mother figure. Anne Donnell was thirty-nine when she enlisted in May 1915. Stationed in Cairo in early September 1916, with a ward full of bored and restless convalescent young men who were forbidden to leave the hospital without a Sister, Anne took the men she referred to as ‘my boys’ on outings. In doing

⁶ Haynes, *We Are Here Too*, p. 164.

⁷ Agnes Jones, letters 7 and 26 October 1917.

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, p. 340.

so, she assumed the role of a mother caring for her children, as well as that of the moral guardian, protecting her 'children' from the evil temptations of Cairo. These outings encouraged the men to talk about their experiences:

On the drive back my boys have lost their shyness or reserve and open out and tell of their experiences – it's so seldom they do. I won't repeat all they tell, but it may help a mother to know that if she has lost her boy it is she, or his dearest, who are his last thought. Trooper Sweeney said that once he came upon the body of an Englishman who had been dead three days. He was alone, and around him lay his photos as if he had looked at each of them one by one until the end. Trooper gathered them up with reverence and sent them back to his people.¹⁰

Donnell often thought of the mothers of 'her boys'. Writing from Lemnos in late 1915, she described not only the enjoyment she found in the camera given to her but also the use she had put it to: 'There is nothing I can think of that would gladden a mother's heart more than a peep at her soldier boy so far away'. She gave many of her boys a photograph to send home for Christmas and 'they were delighted', she wrote.¹¹ Again, the mothers were in the forefront of her mind when the Armistice was signed in November 1918. 'I think of the gladness', she wrote, 'then follows the sadness, and in the gladness I am the saddest because I think of those who have lost, the mothers at home whose sunny boys are not going back to make them glad.'¹² The empathy she felt for the mothers at home is clear, and for the hidden trauma of 'waiting and weeping'. She was bridging the distance between herself on the battlefield and the mothers on the home front, a different expression of Scates' notion of 'adoptive kin',¹³ wherein women were bound together by their shared experiences of grief and loss over their loved ones. As a surrogate wartime mother, the loss was partly hers as well.

There were times, however, when a nurse felt that the 'boys' needed to be brought into line. May Tilton provides an example. Although Anne Donnell may have been prepared to look the other way as an indulgent older sister when her patients went AWL (see Chapter 3), May Tilton was not. Stationed at Suez in late 1915, she was confronted by the medical officer in command of the hospital, Dr Cresswell. He was in a 'towering rage' over the restless night

¹⁰ Donnell, *Letters of an Australian Army Sister*, pp. 107-108.

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 63.

¹² *ibid.*, pp. 272-273.

¹³ Bruce Scates, 'The Unknown Sock Knitter: Voluntary Work, Emotional Labour, Bereavement and the Great War'. *Labour History*, no. 81 (2000), pp. 29-50.

time wanderings of a number of her convalescent patients.¹⁴ Tilton set about trying to catch and identify the absconding men. She described what followed:

The boys asked me why I picked on them. I told them if they were not going to play the game I would be the one to suffer, for I would probably be sent away, as being incapable of managing my wards. The culprits immediately stepped forward and apologised, offering to go to the doctor and do the same. They did, and that was the end of the trouble.¹⁵

May Tilton had obviously delivered a stern reprimand, much in the vein of a mother with a young and disobedient child, and played on the men's sense of guilt in order to bring them back into line.

Moral Police

The nurses were also expected to unofficially fill the role of 'god's police' for their patients. The role involved acting as a chaperone for the men and protecting them from less than savoury individuals and forms of entertainment. Central to the idea of the nurses as moral police was the assumption of the men's naivety, based on their youth. The blame for any moral transgressions, then, was attributed to the immoral nature of their location and its people. Stationed in Cairo in April 1916, for example, Anne Donnell commented that what she found 'so appalling about the place is its filth, and the influence it has on some of our boys. They say, if you live in Egypt long enough you are sure to grow into Egyptian ways.' The soldiers were tempted and seduced into immorality, although this was through no fault of their own.¹⁶ Therefore, the need for the nurses to be the moral guardians for the men was seen as a necessity. It also helped protect the reputation of the AIF.¹⁷ If the women studied for this thesis are any indication, some nurses embraced the role, others saw the need but did not act as moral guardians, and others ignored it.

May Tilton was deeply committed to her role as moral guardian. She placed the blame upon others rather than the soldiers, as evident by her reaction to the advances of a French girl towards an Australian soldier: 'I almost slapped a French girl's face because of the way she

¹⁴ Tilton, *The Grey Battalion*, p. 41.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 42.

¹⁶ Rae, *Veiled Lives*, p. 63.

¹⁷ Bassett, *Guns and Brooches*, p. 80, Harris, *More Than Bombs and Bandages*, p. 138

behaved in the street, accosting one of “our boys””.¹⁸ Tilton clearly felt she had a responsibility to protect her ‘boys’ from the wiles of foreign women.

Evelyn Davies ‘Tevie’ saw the need and similarly placed the blame on the location and the women. She described Cairo as ‘a fearful place for the boys to be let loose in, they can’t help getting into mischief, some of the boys get excited and do very foolish things.’¹⁹ This downplayed the seriousness of the boys’ ‘mischief’, and their agency in engaging in it as well. She was more direct, however, when she heard that her brother Rupert wanted to enlist. ‘I do feel worried at the prospect of Rupert coming, Mum dear’, she wrote. She argued that men like her brother were needed at home in Australia before coming to the real issue: ‘and really when I see fine chaps here being dragged down in this fearful place, I am thankful he is at home, really, for Cairo is a veritable “Hell on Earth”’.²⁰ By 1917, she was stationed in England. ‘I suppose you hear discussions about headquarters in London being in such a bad locality, down at Horseferry Road, Mum it is shame, such fearful women one sees tailing onto Australian boys’, she wrote.²¹ She still clearly blamed the location and women in question, rather than the Australian men. Yet, although she did not entirely condone the men’s fraternisations with the ‘fearful women’ of Horseferry Road and felt that ‘then again water finds its level’, she had begun to move to a more pragmatic view of the situation, even if it was couched in somewhat circumspect terms. She wrote, ‘... still the boys have such a bad time in France that one cannot well blame them when these women are kind and friendly to them.’²² Although Tevie observed the need for it, unlike May Tilton, she was reluctant to take on the role of moral guardian. The immorality of Cairo and Horseferry Road concerned her, as did the ‘mischief’ some of the men got up to. Yet it is obvious that by 1917, she had accepted the fact that the Australian soldiers were not the living embodiments of the stalwart and upright soldier ideal that had been so predominant in the early years of the war.²³ They were, in fact, fallible young men far from the social constraints of home.

Olive Haynes, however, ignored the matter of moral policing entirely. Although, when stationed in Cairo in 1915, she grumbled about the ‘wretched men coming in at all hours’,²⁴ what they had been up to was none of her responsibility. Her view was clearly reflected in her

¹⁸ Tilton, *The Grey Battalion*, p. 79.

¹⁹ AWM 3DRL/3398(B), Evelyn Davies, letter 31 January 1916.

²⁰ *ibid.*, letter 16/2/16.

²¹ *ibid.*, letter n.d.

²² *ibid.*

²³ See Martin Crotty, *Making the Australian Male: Middle-class Masculinity 1870-1920*. Carlton South: Melbourne University Press, 2001; Seal, *Inventing Anzac*; Richard White, *Inventing Australia: Images and Identity, 1688-1980* (Sydney: George Allen and Unwin, 1981).

²⁴ Haynes, *We Are Here Too*, p. 48.

account of the doings of two of the officers she knew. ‘One of the older officers took a young one round Cairo in the Wazzir at midnight and we asked him what it was like’, she wrote. ‘All he said was, “Lord” – the expressive way he said it was enough, and he never said anymore.’²⁵ There is no evidence that Haynes had attempted to stop this excursion from occurring and she recorded its result with a sense of humour. Clearly, she did not see herself as a moral guardian for these men.

Figure 4.1: ‘Diggeresses’.

‘Diggeresses’

The captions in Laura Grubb’s photograph album²⁶ described herself and her fellow nurses on Salonika as ‘Diggeresses’ (see Figure 4.1). Grubb clearly adapted the idea of the Australian soldier as the ‘digger’, and applied it to her own experiences as a wartime nurse. It was an appropriation of a masculine term based on the shared experience of war and an admiration for the digger. Therefore, when Seal wrote, ‘to be “digger” was to be male’,²⁷ this in turn meant that to be ‘diggeress’ was to be female, reflecting the notion of separate spheres that governed gender relations at the time.²⁸ The nurses mirrored many of the typically masculine attributes of the digger in the notion of the diggeress including language, larrikin behaviour, anti-authoritarianism and mateship. This behaviour, however, was adapted to the circumstances, restrictions and social expectations placed on them as the nurses.

The nurses often borrowed from the vernacular of the digger to describe their own experiences. The digger lingo drew on words and phrases relating to the wartime experience of the soldiers, and from the native languages of the places they had served, primarily Arabic and French.²⁹ Alice Ross King, for example, used it when writing in her diary about one of her many flirtations whilst in Egypt in May 1915. ‘Came to a pretty fair understanding of “A”’, she wrote, ‘He pretends to be really in love & talks of forever & all that. But we are only to be

²⁵ *ibid.*, p 58.

²⁶ AWM PR83/040, Grubb.

²⁷ Seal, *Inventing Anzac*, p. 77.

²⁸ Basett, *Guns and Brooches*, Harris, *More Than Bombs and Bandages*.

²⁹ Amanda Laugesen, ‘Australian First World War “Slanguage”’, *Journal of the Australian War Memorial*, no. 38 (2003), Seal, *Inventing Anzac*, p. 24.

chums & if he worries me or gets too loving I'm going to imshi.'³⁰ 'Imshi', of course, meant to go, or leave.

Another example of the appropriation of digger behaviour by the diggeress was the more harmless elements in larrikin behaviour often associated with the Australian soldier. Olive Haynes wrote home from No.2 AGH on 1 June 1917, describing how the boys were 'such tricks...They get round in the queerest rigs in the hospital.' This is immediately followed with her own anecdote of her and the other sisters getting up 'a sort of fancy dress'. For Olive, this included donning an officer's suit and pretending she was an officer, and parading around in costume in front of her Matron and fellow nurses.

The English Matron and two Sisters from over the way came to watch, and when they were going I asked our Matron should I see them home and she said, 'Yes, do,' so I hied along with them. I think they were slightly shocked, and I was dead scared my voice would give me away when we passed the men – they were quite relieved when I said goodnight and saluted them. It was only across the road, too.³¹

In the same way that such behaviour acted as an outlet for the soldiers, as a form of distraction and a way in which they could momentarily forget the war, so, too, it did for the nurses.

The anti-authoritarianism of the digger was also seen in many of the nurses' disregard for the military's attempts to subject them to what they saw as petty military regulations. The literature on nurses during the Great War has paid particular attention to the tensions between nurses and the military structure into which they were incorporated, and the conflicts between the nurse leaders, such as Jane Bell and the military hierarchy.³² But there is also evidence that the nurses in general were inclined to balk when orders issued seemed unreasonable. Alice Ross King provides one example. 'Old Ramsay Smith', No. 1 AGH's Commanding Officer, had ordered a staff photograph to be taken on the morning of 15 March 1915. He also ordered the nurses who had just finished night duty to attend. Alice was one. After a long shift, all she wanted was her bed. To show what she thought about the order, she sat in the back row with her back to the camera.³³

³⁰ AWM PRO2082, King, diary entry 28 May 1915.

³¹ Haynes, *We Are Here Too*, pp. 204-205.

³² See, in particular, Bassett, *Guns and Brooches* and Rae, *Scarlet Poppies*.

³³ AWM PRO2082, King, diary entry 15 March 1915.

The conferral of honorary rank on the nurses in 1916 placed considerable social restrictions on them: for example, there was to be no talking or socialising with NCO's or privates, except whilst on duty. That stirred some initial resentment. Anne Donnell, the nurse who had protected patients who were AWL, was certainly irritated. She wrote home on 26 October 1916.

We never asked for stars – we have never received a commission from the King. We left Australia as Nursing Sisters and such we wish to be. Why afflict our freedom so, and with a threat that would, if carried out, cast a slur on us and the whole of the Australian Nursing Service abroad. Our boys have left home and country to give their lives, if need be, in a strange land. Could we slight them so? And for an unwritten order – no, we couldn't. In this instance our hearts rise above such unreasonableness. What will the consequences be? We dearly love our Unit, and pieces that appeared in the papers from time to time will tell you we have done good service. If a friend, or a relative, from the ranks came to see me, or any of us, and the threat were carried out, well I think we might just as well be recalled to Australia.³⁴

For Donnell, rank, even if honorary, was divisive, separating her and her fellow nurses from 'our boys'. The resentment of authority, often associated with the digger tradition, as well as a belief in a rough egalitarianism also associated with the digger tradition, is evident. And, like the diggers, she saw herself as part of a voluntary civilian force, not as a member of the regular armed forces.

The women studied for this thesis frequently noted the importance of mateship for the men they nursed, often with admiration. Evelyn 'Tevie' Davies, for example, wrote, '... the saddest part of all is to hear the men talk about their mates who have fallen, I didn't think men became as fond of each other as they really do, they are fine even the roughest of them.'³⁵ Anne Donnell wrote, 'We just love the way the boys do things for one another – the Tommy's "chum" or the Aussie's "mate"'.³⁶ It is not surprising, then, to find its equivalent amongst the nurses.

³⁴ Donnell, *Letters of an Australian Army Sister*, p. 127.

³⁵ AWM 3DRL/3398(B), Davies, letter 15 January 1916.

³⁶ Donnell, *Letters of an Australian Army Sister*, pp. 107-108.

The mateship between the nurses themselves is often mentioned in passing in the literature. Rae has identified it as another missing aspect of Australia's told history of the war.³⁷ Butler developed it more fully in her exploration of Kit McNaughton's friendship with Ida Mockridge. The relationship formed between these two women was strong and the women remained friends after the war.³⁸ If the nurses studied for this thesis are any indication, like the diggers, the more remote, intense and difficult the work, the more the nurses turned to each other for support. Three examples illustrate the role mateship could play.

The nurses stationed on Lemnos from August 1915 to January 1916 lived and worked under 'appalling conditions',³⁹ which included inadequate food and medical supplies, extreme weather conditions and makeshift accommodation that could barely withstand the conditions. Anne Donnell had no hesitation in describing the conditions and the impact they had on the nurses. Yet, she also wrote of how the sisters who remained 'bright and happy' throughout this particularly difficult period helped her, and others, to cope with the conditions.⁴⁰ Here she echoed the memoirs of many of the men writing about their experiences where the 'bright and happy' members of the group helped forge a sense of belonging that was an integral component of mateship.⁴¹

Evelyn 'Tevie' Davies wrote home in 1918, 'It is such a comfort to me, Mum having Elsie Deakin, Mum she is a fine girl', adding, 'having a Pal makes such a difference, she is the only friend I have made since leaving, she is really not strong and I am able to help her a bit.'⁴² Tevie did not specify what Elsie's problems may have been, but her description of the relationship with Elsie, and the support that was an element of mateship, echoes similar sentiments in the soldiers' letters and diaries explored by historians such as Bill Gammage.⁴³ Alice Ross King recorded a similar sentiment.

After the death of her fiancé, Harry, she was posted to No.2 ACCS at Trois Arbres. Her diary entries throughout this time are brief and perfunctory, and her truncated sentences hint at the pace of life at the CCS and the impact it had on her: 'Had a most appalling [sic] time. Ypres offensive. Too big to write up now. Just a few things I want to remember. I can't believe there

³⁷ Rae, *Veiled Lives*, p. 231.

³⁸ Butler, *Kitty's War*.

³⁹ Rae, *Scarlet Poppies*, p. 229.

⁴⁰ Donnell, *Letters of an Australian Army Sister*, pp. 68-69.

⁴¹ See, for example, Edward P. Lynch, *Somme Mud: The Wartime Experiences of an Infantryman in France, 1916-1919* (edited by Will Davies, London: Bantam 2008).

⁴² AWM 3DRL/3398(B), Davies, letter 11 December 1918.

⁴³ Bill Gammage, *The Broken Years: Australian Soldiers in the Great War* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1975).

is a God. It is too awful for words.’⁴⁴ Harry’s death and the pace of work in the CCS took its toll. A later entry read, ‘I got a bit shell-shocked. Had a nasty near miss with a bit of H.E. [heavy artillery] Kept on duty but used to wet my pants whenever Fritz came over. Topsy told M. on me. So she told Matron Conyers I’d been too long at C.C.S. So I had.’⁴⁵ Alice’s unwillingness to admit herself she could no longer cope with duty at the CCS was typical of many of the nurses’ attitudes: if the soldiers could keep going, so could they. However, it is also clear that it needed a mate like Topsy to make her realise that she *had* been ‘too long at C.C.S.’.

By the time Gertrude Moberly published her memoirs in 1933, the notion of the diggeress had considerable currency. As noted in Chapter 1, she described herself as such in 1915 and it was an important part of her narrative. For example, she described her response to an Officer Commanding’s strict enforcement of the rule that the nurses dined separately from the doctors and convalescing officer patients this way: ‘I told him one day that I would suggest a rope being tied down the centre of our deck where we all sit, and thus separate the he’s from the she’s.’⁴⁶ She may, or may not, have been cheeky enough to make such a suggestion: the fact that she claimed to have done so remains an interesting example of the reconstruction of memories discussed in Chapter 1.

⁴⁴ AWM PRO2082, King, diary entry 4 August 1917.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, diary entry 5 August 1917.

⁴⁶ Moberly, *Experiences of a ‘Dinki Di’*, p. 67.

CONCLUSION

The fifteen women studied for this thesis reflect the multi-faceted nature of the nurses' relationships during the Great War. In some instances, they clearly shared views and experiences, in others they differed, depending on their character, and the time and place of their service.

The stories of women like Alice Ross King and Olive Haynes have attracted the interest of historians, and their stories are usually told within the context of the wartime romance trope. Although it is true that, in some ways, their stories do match the popular notion of the wartime romance, especially with the elements of immediate attraction, a whirlwind courtship, and indefinite periods of separation, their relationships were also far more complex than is usually acknowledged, reflected in doubts about the future of a relationship forged in a time of war. Alice's doubts were just as much concerned with how little she knew Harry Moffitt, as they were about the possibility of his death. Olive Haynes bowed to parental doubts until Pat Dooley was almost killed, which led her to take what could have been seen as a precipitous act – marriage without family consent. The other element running through both women's stories was their reluctance to completely abandon their middle-class upbringings and attitudes towards courtship and marriage. This reluctance undercut the novelty and intensity of their perceived archetypal wartime romances.

Yet not all wartime liaisons were as serious as those experienced by King and Haynes. Flirting at various levels was also part of the game, which suggests that the nurses did not always necessarily position themselves as mother or sister to their patients in an attempt to deny the possibility of sexual attraction and relationships. The freedom to harmlessly engage in this way with the soldiers was clearly embraced by a number of these women. Lucy Pitman's relationship with Billy, distinguished by his jealousy, was also far removed from the comfortable parameters of the wartime romance. However, the most complex and enigmatic of the relationships examined in this thesis is the one between Laura Grubb and Dave Sharpie. It fell at times into the romance and flirting categories, and at others into neither.

Whilst nursing at 48 CCS, Anne Donnell wrote, 'I only know that I am not a mere nurse, but represent to them for the time being their dearest ones'.¹ She was not alone in expressing that sentiment. An important part of the experience of the nurses studied for this thesis was the

¹ Donnell, *Letters of an Australian Army Sister*, p. 217.

role of family and surrogate family, evident in so many of their letters and diaries. This could, and did, take many forms, from the sister figure and the confidante, to the mother figure. Anne Donnell was a good example of the mother figure, and her identification with the mothers at home was a key, and often poignant, part of her nursing experience. In part this reflected her age, yet other nurses who were younger also shared her experience. Agnes Jones extended her sense of mothering even to the enemy, and May Tilton clearly saw her patients as 'boys' needing a dressing down. Agnes Jones also provides a good example of how a woman with a brother at the front could extend her affections for him onto the patients she nursed. She was not alone in doing so. Nor, it should be noted, were the surrogate sibling relationships one-sided. Elsie Grant, for example, drew great comfort from the Australian soldiers who turned up after the bombing of No.3 ACCS. Although it may well be true that nurses adopted the role of sister to remove the moral ambiguity surrounding female nurses and male patients, accepting that as the sole explanation ignores the sense of collusion, humour and tolerance some 'sisters' accorded their 'brothers'. Anne Donnell refused to report patients AWL, and there is no doubt that Lettitia Moreton enjoyed the joke with the donkey as much as the men did. Although the idea of surrogate families has been mainly explored on the home front with notions of fictive and adoptive kin, it was also clearly at work on the battlefield. It may have been transitory and fleeting, but it offered the same comfort and support as the networks formed in Australia.

Laura Grubb's appropriation of the figure of the 'digger' to her own experiences as a wartime nurse as a 'diggeress' was a clear indication of how she viewed the experiences of the nurses and soldiers as shared ones. She was not the only one to use this term, nor, presumably, hold such a belief. The suggestion, too, that the relationships between them were defined as much by the influence of the soldier, as it was by the support the nurse provided, cannot be missed. Gertrude Moberly's use of the diggeress in her memoir demonstrates that, like the term digger, it could be used as a way of contextualising particular wartime experiences for a wider audience.

Although the focus of this thesis has been on the personal, non-professional lives of the nurses, rather than the demands of their work, there were times when the two clearly overlapped. Listening to their patients' talk, as May Tilton did, or, as in the case of the autograph books kept by Sister Bertish and Mary Inger, 'listening' to what the men wrote, shows how important the provision of emotional as well as physical comfort could be. That overlap also extended to the other roles that the women filled. According to their particular context and situation, they could often fill several roles at the same time. Agnes Jones, for example, could be mother and sister, Anne Donnell sister, moral guardian and mother, and

Olive Haynes lover and mother. Bertish and Inger's autograph books also demonstrate the simultaneous multiplicity of roles. The messages left for them show how the soldiers saw them and their relationship, and the ways these men saw them were diverse. There were also times when the women adopted very different views of their role. For example, May Tilton took her role as moral guardian very seriously, Tevie Davies saw the need but stood on the sidelines, while Olive Haynes dismissed the role completely.

Kirsty Harris argued that the nurses were more than 'angel[s] of mercy', defined by their 'devotion to duty'.² This thesis has explored some aspects of what that may have meant.

² Harris, *More Than Bombs and Bandages*, p. 4.

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