

THE COO-EES

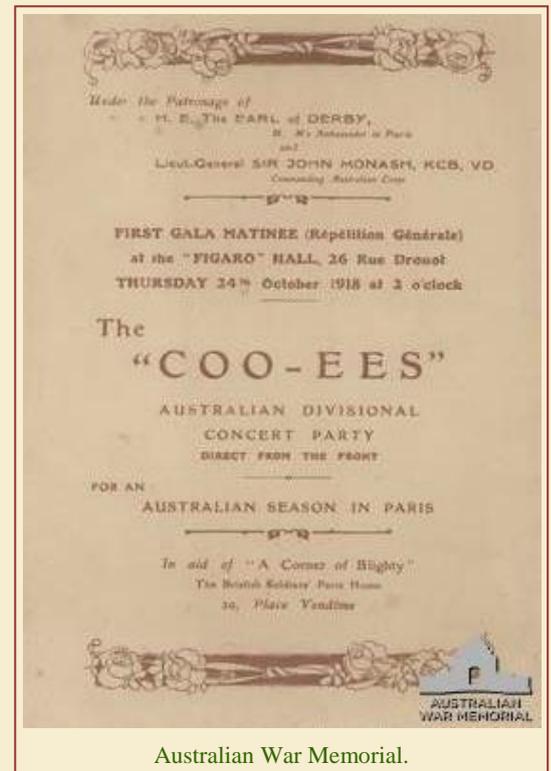
Established in December 1916 to provide Christmas and New Year's entertainment for A.I.F. troops, the Coo-ees concert party continued to perform along and behind the battle lines in France and elsewhere through until 1919. The original troupe comprised six performers, but by early 1918 had been expanded to over 30, including an orchestra. Performers who found success on the variety stage after the war included Jock Thompson and George Harvey.

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The music was eventually gathered from various sources, costumes borrowed from kindly-disposed French civilians, and the many other difficulties successfully solved. In their first stunt all objectives were attained. In fact they made such a success of what was at first intended to be merely a brief raid in military histrionics, that they were ordered to dig in, and have been hanging on ever since before dense crowds of cheering Aussies, who nightly make their wild rushes to their position (Apr. 1918, 5).

The *Aussie* article further notes that the troupe would generally perform in village halls when the Division was resting, taking these opportunities to show off artistic and attractive stage settings. When the battalions went "forward" the troupe followed, travelling from one battalion to another and presenting as many as six shows a day. These would be staged in sheds, barns, stables or any type of building that could serve their purpose. Sometimes the performances would be given in the open air, with a G.S. Wagon used as the stage. They were even occasionally forced to work without a stage - simply setting up their performance space on a flat piece of ground.

Two Coo-ees performers who are known to have found success on the variety stage after the war were Jock Thompson and George Harvey.



Australian War Memorial.

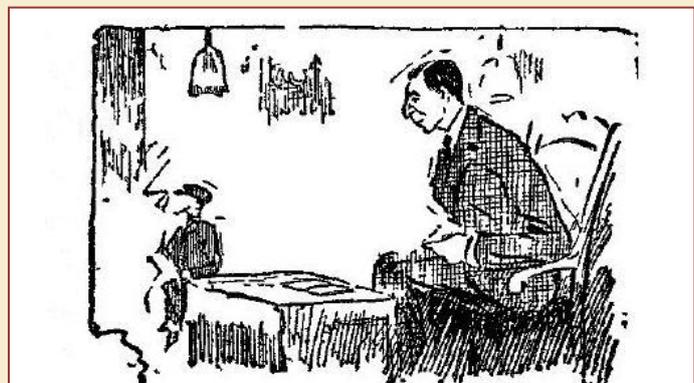


Pte. Geo. Harvey serves out the real Scotch.
"Now, the officers, only will sing the chorus." Silence! "Gee, boys, what a peaceful war it would be if the officers would only remain as silent on parade!"

Aussie Apr. 1918, 5.

SEE ALSO

- [Jock Thompson](#) (Famous Diggers)



Ventriloquist D. Gates induces his humorous wooden friend to smoke a cigarette—and he "does the drawback," too!

Aussie Apr. 1918, 5.

PERSONNEL

The length of time each artist was associated with the company is presently unknown.

Rank abbreviations: **Pte.** = Private • **Cpl.** = Corporal • **L/Cpl.** Lance Corporal • **Dvr.** = Driver • **Sgt.** = Sergeant • **S Sgt.** = Staff Sergeant.

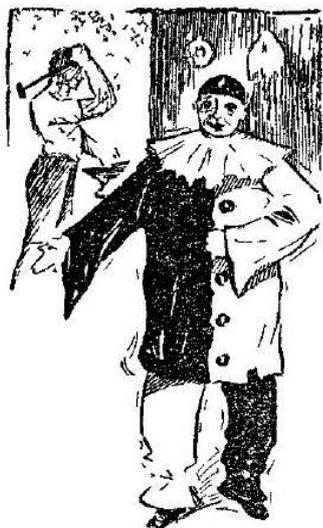
1. **Troupe members:** Incl. Pte. A. Brown, Dvr. C. Trewavis, Cpl. H.F. Williams, Pte. F. Jones, Dvr. G. Stevenson, Pte. George Harvey, Pte. N. McInnes, Pte. A.H. Gates, L/Cpl. F. Watsford, J. Thompson.
2. **Associated Practitioners:** Sgt. T. S. Hewitt (stage manager), L/Cpl. G.M. Pearce (conductor)
3. **Additional notes and/or historical clarification:**

- **A. Brown:** Comedian.
- **C. Trewavis:** Singer.
- **H. F. Williams:** Singer.
- **F. Jones:** Singer.
- **G. Stevenson:** Singer
- **George Harvey:** Scottish comedian.
- **N. McInnes:** Elocutionist.
- **A. H. Gates:** Ventriloquist.
- **F. Watsford:** Female Impersonator
- **Jock Thompson:** Singer.



Cpl. H. F. Williams warbles "The Smithy Song," assisted by an imitation Smithy and a real anvil and hammer.

Aussie Apr. 1918, 5.



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Aussie Apr. 1918, 5.

PART II		
13. DRAMATIC SKETCH IN ONE ACT		
A condensation of the Drama of the Century		
THE SILVER KING		
Cast of Characters in the order in which they appear		
Wilfred Dwyer	The Silver King	Cpl. George HARVEY
Stan' Jellies	His old Servant	Pte. Mac' THE DINES
Elish' Coombie	A lost Towner	Sgt. T.S. HEWITT
Crippie	A hanger	Pte. J. THOMPSON
Capt. Herbert Skinner	Alias "The Spider"	L/Cpl. F. J. WATSFORD
Ernie Corbett	One Warr's Clerk	Pte. George HARVEY
INTERVAL		
SELECTION		Divisional Orchestra
14. BASS SOLO & CHORUS	<i>Barbier's Boy (from Maid of the Mountains)</i>	Cpl. Williams at Chorus
15. Character Sketches	<i>Schindl</i>	Pte. N. McInnes
16. Quartette	<i>Soldier's Farewell</i>	The Coo-ees
17. Baritone Solo	<i>Heroes of the Dardanelles</i>	Pte. J. Thompson
18. Humorous Sketches	<i>Talkers and Tea</i>	Cpl. G. Harvey at Pte. McInnes
19. Scotch Specialty	<i>Maggie McKeen</i>	L/Cpl. Watsford at Pte. Harvey
20. Baritone Solo	<i>Master of Malaga</i>	Pte. C. Trewavis
21. Solo at Chorus	<i>Lucy Moon</i>	Pte. A. Brown
22. FINALE	<i>Operatic Chorus</i>	The Coo-ees
All acknowledgments made to composers and Publishers of Musical and Dramatic Items.		
AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL		
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Pte. N. McInnes tells of "The Shooting of Dan McGrew."

Aussie Apr. 1918, 5.

The above program excerpt is from the Coo-ees' season at the Salle Hoche, Paris (24-30 Oct. 1918). The entertainment was organised in aid of the British Soldiers' Paris Home under the patronage of the Earl of Derby and Lieutenant-General Sir John Monash. In addition to the usual songs, comedy routines and sketches the performers presented an abridged version of Henry Arthur Jones and Henry Herman's English melodrama, *The Silver King*.

Courtesy of the Australian War Memorial.

FURTHER REFERENCE

- "Aussie Field Theatres: V. The Smart Set." *Aussie: The Australian Soldiers' Magazine* Apr. 1918, 5.
- "Concert and Theatre Programs Collection - First World War 1914-1918, Series 4, Sub-series 1, File 1: Formation Headquarters, 1915-1919." *Australian War Memorial*. [sighted 4/05/2020]

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