

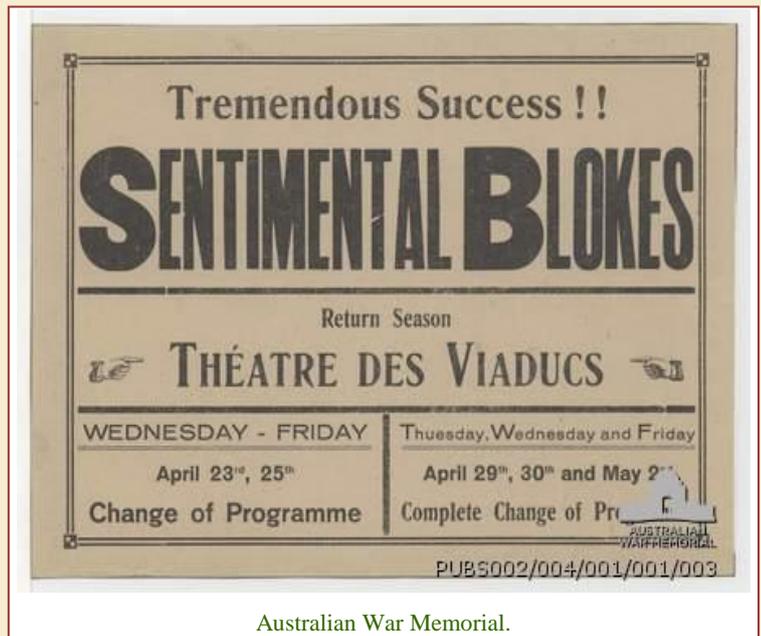
SENTIMENTAL BLOKES

One of several concert parties formed during World War I, the Sentimental Blokes presented a typically vaudeville-style entertainment, heavily-laden with comedy, songs, dances and sketches. Arguably the best known performers from the troupe in later years were female impersonator Lindsay Kemble and basso Roy Glenister.

The Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZACs) first began organising field theatres, or concert parties, in 1916, in response to the psychological impact of the war on its soldiers. Other digger troupes included the [Anzac Coves](#), the [Kangaroos](#), the [Green Diamonds](#), the [Cooees](#), the New Zealand Digger Pierrots and the [Smart Set Diggers](#). While most of the troupes folded after the war and immediate post-war occupation years, two of these companies went on to tour the Antipodes to much success in the 1920s – these being the Digger Pierrots (renamed the [Famous Diggers](#) under [Pat Hanna](#)'s direction) and the [Smart Set Diggers](#), led by [Charles Holt](#). The Sentimental Blokes, which took its name from C.J. Dennis' recently released, and extraordinarily popular book of verse, *Songs of the Sentimental Bloke*, did not last beyond the war. However, one of its members, Private [Lindsay Kemble](#), did make a name for himself in vaudeville during the 1920s as one of the great Australian female impersonators of that period.

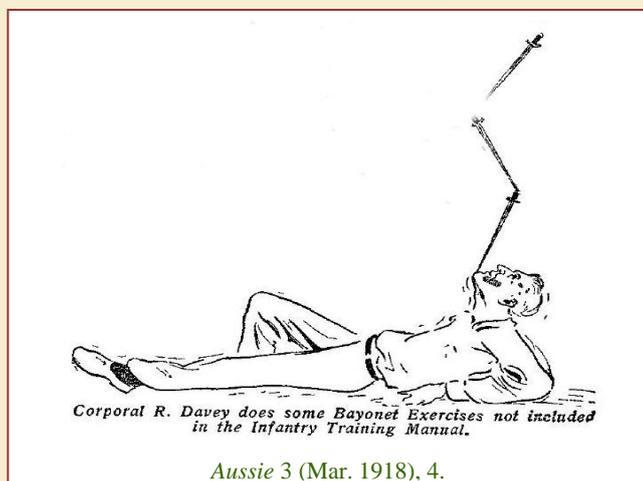
In 1918 *Aussie: The Australian Soldiers' Magazine* highlighted the importance of concert parties to the morale of soldiers by publishing a series called "Aussie Field Theatres." In the first of these, dedicated to the Sentimental Blokes, the writer explains:

The Field Vaudeville Theatres have become a recognised feature of our soldier life. And everybody is grateful for them. They are something more than a luxury – they are a necessity.... This is fully recognised by our "Heads" and facilities are provided for procuring the best talent in each Division and for enabling the Theatres to carry on under the most satisfactory conditions possible in the Field. That this is taken the best advantage of and very highly appreciated by all ranks is amply demonstrated by the crowds that constantly flock to the various Divisional theatres and by the enthusiastic reception given to the various artists.¹



Australian War Memorial.

The Sentimental Blokes was organised sometime in 1917 under the leadership of Lieutenants W.J. Walsh and W.M. Blake (producers) and Sergeant W.J. Goodall (stage manager). Right from the start the star attraction was Kemble, who the Aussie writer describes as the company's "trump card." Hailing from Burra, near Adelaide (South Australia), Victor Lindsay Kemble and become somewhat infamous in that city prior to enlisting when he was arrested for "masquerading as a woman." According to police such the 19 year old, whose appearance was so convincing that only close examination could determine his gender, had deceived several young men in the past few days.² His notoriety saw him become an instant celebrity on the vaudeville stage and even led to him starring in a short moving picture.



Aussie 3 (Mar. 1918), 4.

Although each of the Anzac concert parties included at least one highly experienced and totally believable "girl," in their line-up, with notable others being [Tiki Carpenter](#) and Charles Holt (Smart Set Diggers), Kemble was arguably the finest in this line of artistry, a view supported by the *Aussie* writer:

"Their trump card is their "Girl." She's a dear. Aussie has seen a lot of girl girls not nearly so girlish as Pte V. Kemble's impersonation. Before he got mixed up in this international argument, [this] writer's job brought him pretty closely into contact with Australian histrionics, but never has he seen a better female impersonator than that put up by Kemble. He shows up best in "Grow Little Mushroom, Grow!" and [the sketch] "China Town" (4).

¹ "Aussie Field Theatres," 4.

² "In Women's Clothes," 7.

As with other digger troupes the Sentimental Blokes presented a typical vaudeville entertainment, heavily-laden with comedy, songs, dances and sketches (notably "China Town," and "Snail's Aeroplane Tours"):

The Blokes' specialise in comedy. The combination includes a number of clever comedians who serve up good, humorous patter and songs, which never fail to produce the loud laugh that denotes the happy mind and the vigorous hand-clap that expresses the appreciative soul.³

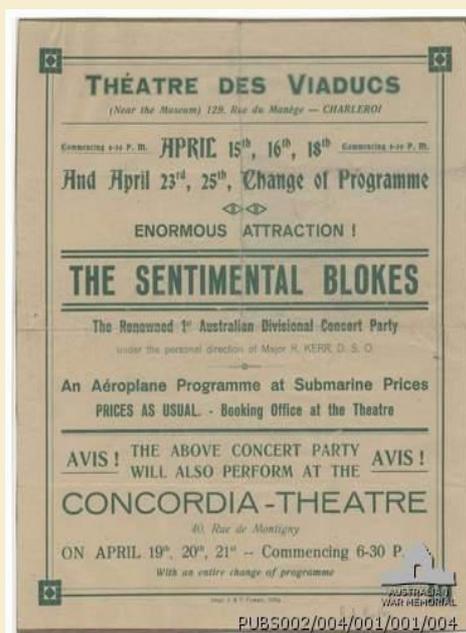


"Sentimental Blokes" in France

They are members of the "Sentimental Blokes" Concert Party, which has done splendid work amongst the boys at the front, showing to about 800 soldiers every night. They also give entertainments in the hospitals. Often within reach of enemy shells, and have raised funds for both the British and French Red Cross. When the photo was taken they were at Ypres. The "lady" of the company is Pte. V. Kemble, a native of Burra, South Australia, who enlisted in New South Wales. The other is Driver Roy Glenister.

Sydney Mail 15 May 1918, 33.

As with other ANZAC concert parties, the "Blokes" remained in Europe and Great Britain for some time, entertaining troupes that were still required as part end-of-war peacekeeping and security measures. On 4 July 1919 the company even performed for His Royal Highness, the Prince of Wales.⁴ After the troupe was disbanded and its members demobilised, Lindsay Kemble returned to Australia and briefly toured his own variety company before joining the [Mademoiselle Mimi Diggers](#). In the late 1920s he also teamed up with fellow female impersonators Tiki Carpenter and [Charles Holt](#) in the reformed [Smart Set Diggers](#). Another "Blokes" performer, Roy Glenister was also associated with the Smart Set Diggers between 1920 and 1923.



Australian War Memorial

³ *Aussie* 3 (Mar. 1918), 4.

⁴ [Editorial], 2.

SEE ALSO

- Roy Glenister (Smart Set Diggers / Issues Company)
- Lindsay Kemble

PERSONNEL

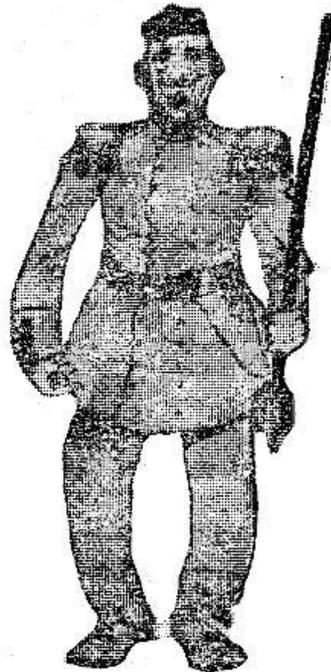
The period of association for individuals associated with the troupe during the war are approximate only, as the line-up changed frequently.

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

1. **Troupe members:** Incl. Pte. Anderson, Pte. A.D. Bett (Pte.), Lieut. W.M. Blake, Pte. R. Cerise, Corp. R. Davey, Driver R. Glenister, Sgt. W.J. Goodall, Pte. V.L. Kemble, Pte. H. Marther, Sapper R. Smedley, Pte. H. Stevens.
2. **Production team:** Incl. Lieut. Sapper H. Beyer (lighting), W.M. Blake (producer), Sgt. W.J. Goodall (stage manager/director), Capt. Gould, R.Q.M.S Noonan (scenic art), Pte. Letchford (scenic art)
3. **Music:** 1st Pioneer Band (incl. Driver Loosen, music box/piano).
4. **Additional notes and/or historical clarification:**
 - **Pte. Anderson:** Ragtime singer
 - **A. D. Bett:** Tenor
 - **R. Cerise:** Comedian/singer.
 - **R. Davey:** Magician/equilibrist/juggler
 - **Roy Glenister:** Basso/actor.
 - **W. J. Goodall:** Monologist.
 - **Lindsay Kemble:** Female impersonator/singer/dancer.
 - **H Marther:** Comedian
 - **R. Smedley:** Musician (mandolin)
 - **H. Stevens:** Singer



Pte. V. Kemble, in "Grow, Little Mushroom, Grow."



Sapper V. Reynolds, as "The Beauty of the Guards."



*- Geoff Hewkins
Pte. H. Marther sings about his "Garden of Parsnips."*

FURTHER REFERENCE

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- "In Women's Clothes: Female Impersonator in Court." *Advertiser* (Adelaide) 13 Jan. 1915, 7.
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The Sentimental Blokes at Chatelet, Belgium, 14 Jan. 1919.
Australian War Memorial.

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