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The Lowrey Girls - A family born to serve and care for others.

This article on World War One, focussing on our girls, will consider what the war experience was like for them and how they were celebrated at home. For those unaware, the girls discussed are Bessie, Hazel, Olivia, and Joyce. Their parents were Anne (nee Daunt) and Joseph Lowrey.

The girls grew up at "Hazel Glen" on Washpool Road, Stroud. The family enjoyed activities such as attending the Church of England for Sunday service, singing in the choir, and playing tennis. But, their lives were destined for bigger things. In what is believed to be a unique situation, four girls from the one family signed up for World War One.

Olivia was a Nursing Officer with Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service Reserve. She worked in British field hospitals in Egypt and France. Olivia was celebrated as someone that 'gave of her very best to the sick and suffering and was an administrator almost without peer', having given 18 years' service as Matron of Scott Memorial Hospital in Scone NSW¹. The girls were very dedicated to their service without focussing on the awful aspects of war. War time letters give a wonderful insight to this time.

Bessie, wrote a letter to her aunt which was published in the local newspaper. It read like a piece of travel writing. Bessie provided an interesting description of her time overseas. She described travelling from Ceylon to Bombay and the surrounds, stating that 'it [was] rather marvellous being in India' and that it was 'like a dream'. She was in awe of the 'wonderful plantations of rubber, cocoa, banana, the perfume, the quaint natives, [and] the glorious buildings'. Matron Lowrey adored Bombay as well, describing beautiful main streets with 'glorious buildings' and 'glorious trees'. The job at hand, nursing soldiers, is mentioned briefly. The officers being cared for were from the Persian Gulf and Mesopotamia. She painted a wonderful picture of the adventure that she was on. It is evident that she wanted to send a positive picture to her family and the community. Additionally, Matron Lowrey has informed the region and beyond what life was like in India. This is important because many would not have



been to India and possibly would not get to India². Hazel also served in Bombay with Bessie, as well as Egypt and England. The community thought greatly of their folk that went to war.

On return from war service in May 1919 Bessie was treated to a celebration organised by the Welcome Home Committee. The night was one of music, thank you's, gifts, medals, praise, and dancing. The social writer for the *Sydney Sun* described the event as 'a great reception [with] several presentations made to [Bessie] by the residents and patriotic bodies'³. The School of Arts was the centre of many festivities.

Joyce Lowrey celebrated passing her military exams with 'a snowball evening held in the local School of Arts'. The Stroud correspondent noted that, 'Miss Joyce Lowrey is to be congratulated on having passed all qualifications for military service. Miss Joyce is very young and is the 4th daughter who has taken up this noble work'⁴.

Sharon Burke ©2015

This article was possible thanks to the files in the Stroud Historical Society and articles in *The Dungog Chronicle* found on Trove.

¹ *Dungog Chronicle*, 25/10/1950; ² *Dungog Chronicle*, 23/01/1917;

³ *Dungog Chronicle*, 06/06/1919; ⁴ *Dungog Chronicle*, 21/06/1918.



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