

THE KOOKABURRAS [1]

One of the first Australian concert parties to begin operating along the battle lines of Europe during WWI, The Kookaburras (aka The Kooks)¹ were established in late 1916 and continued through until 1919. Among the artists associated with the troupe were George Long (female impersonator), George Jennings (vocalist) and Johnny Marks (later a member of the Famous Diggers).

The 5th Australian Divisional Concert Party, better known as the Kookaburras, was established towards the end of 1916, and continued to perform along the front and in various towns through until early 1919. Two countries the Kookaburras are known to have played in during the war are France and Belgium. On some occasions, when the troupe was performing away from the battlelines, it was accompanied by the Signal Company Orchestra.

In an article on the troupe, published as part of the "Aussie Field Theatres" series in 1918, an *Aussie* magazine contributor said of the Kookaburras:

Starting out at the end of 1916 the Kooks have shown many hundreds of times in the various parts of the line to which Aussies have gone to keep their engagements with Fritz. They know how to mix and serve a good programme of mirth and music. Like all our versatile and enterprising Field Shows, they can transform an old barnyard or a plonker-pounded building in to a quite a decent-looking theatre possessing a good stage and attractive props, within a few hours (Sept. 1918, 4).

The same article also distinguishes the singers as being either "straight" (Ashworth, Ransom, Cushing and James) or "fancy" (Jennings, O'Brien and Pirie).



Australian War Memorial.

PERSONNEL

Records from the Australian War Memorial indicate that the line-up (as well as the production team) changed over time, with only a few performers possibly remaining in the company over the course of its lifetime.

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



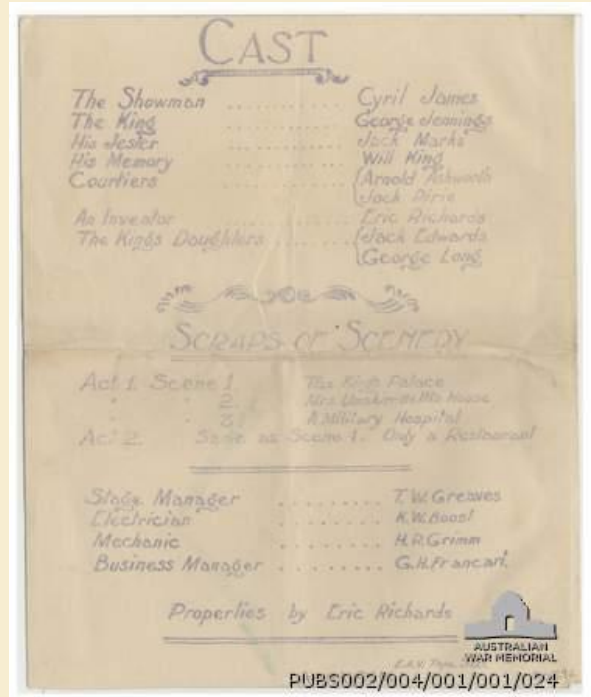
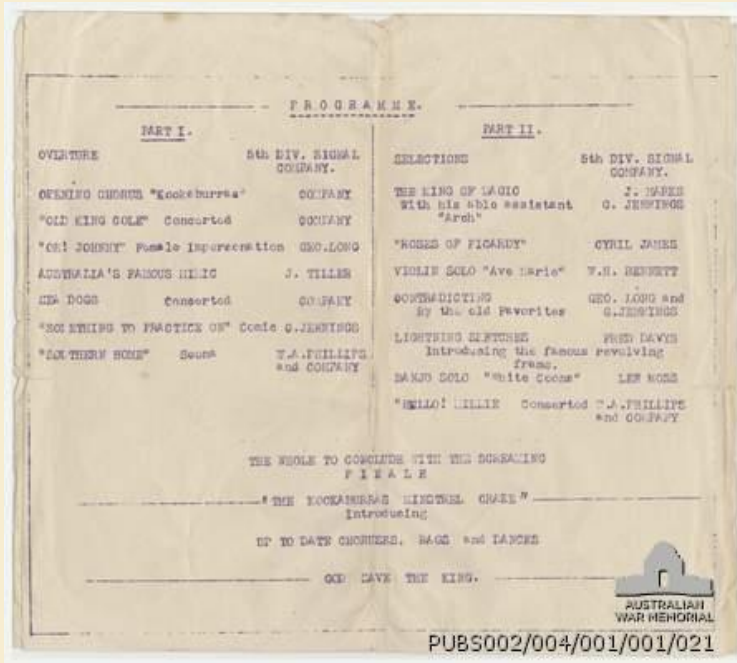
Australian War Memorial.

- 1. Troupe members:** Incl. Arnold Ashworth (Cpl), W. H. Bennett, T. Blain, A. Cushing (Pte), Fred Davys, Jack Edwards, Sig. Cyril James, L/Cpl. George Jennings, George Long (L/Cpl), Jock Marks, Len Moss, L. O'Brien (Pte), Staff Sgt. Moore, W. Phillips, Jock Pirie (Pte), Pte. S. Ransom (Pte), Eric Richards, J. Tiller, J. Wood (Pte).
- 2. Production team:** K. W. Boon (electrician), G. H. Francari (business manager), T. W. Greaves (stage manager), H. R. Grimm (Mechanic), Will King (Pte, scenic artist), Eric Richards, (Properties), H. Watson (Pte, electrician), J. Wood (Pte. cashier),
- 3. Additional notes and/or historical clarification:**
 - **T. Blain:** Pianist
 - **George Long:** Female impersonator.
 - **Jock Marks:** Believed to be Johnny Marks, later a member of the Famous Diggers.
 - **Staff Sgt. Moore:** Violinist
 - **H. Watson:** Also doubled as a "trick violinist" and "Babbling Brook" (ASE: Sept. 1918, 4).

¹ Another concert party called the Kookaburras was formed by the No 2 Squadron, Australian Flying Corps in 1918. The AVTA recognises this troupe as The Kookaburras [2].

FURTHER REFERENCE

"Aussie Field Theatres: IV. - The Kookaburras." ASE: 7 (Sept. 1918), 4.
 "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 1/08/2012]



Australian War Memorial



Aussie 7 (Sept. 1918), 20.