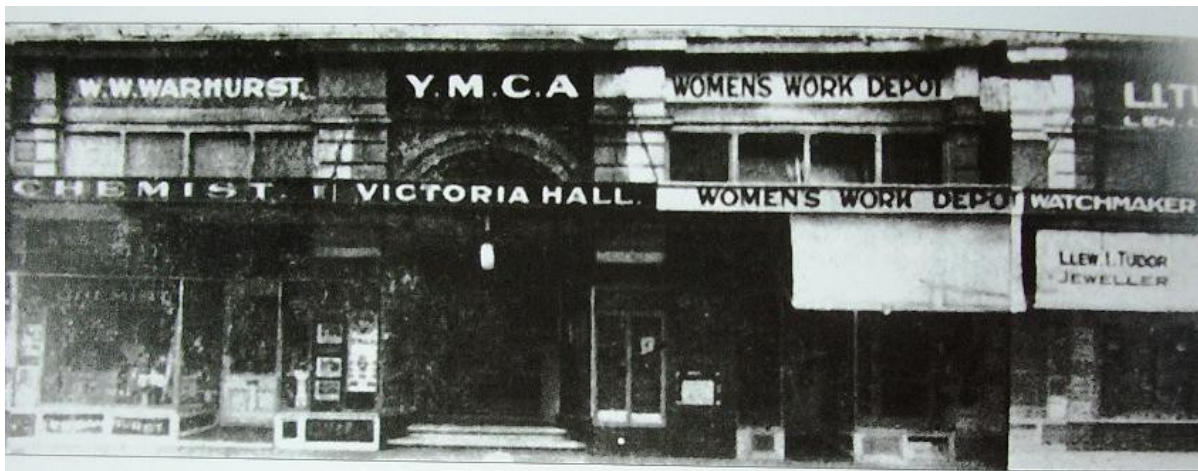


THE WOMEN'S WORK DEPOT — ONCE 'THE LEAGUE OF LOYAL WOMEN'S SHOP'

by Bridget Jolly

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The Women's Work Depot in 1936 at 69 Gawler Place, western side, the new shop that opened at noon on 7 May 1923. The Gawler Place entrance to City Cross is now located there (Campbell & Bradley, 2012. p. 126).

THE first premises of the Women's Work Depot opened in April 1920, at 51 Gawler Place, and when the lease expired the Depot moved to 69 Gawler Place in the YMCA's Victoria Hall. By March 1960 the Depot knew it would have to move again, to North Adelaide, its final address. The Depot was formed from the League of Loyal Women.¹

The League of Loyal Women



The League of Loyal Women in South Australia, a women's war-time organisation, was formed on 20 July 1915 during the Great War. It was started by the wife of Lieutenant Colonel Carew Reynell, commanding officer of the 9th Light Horse. It went into recess in the New Year 1923.

¹ One of the meeting places of the Women's Suffrage League was the YMCA Hall. South Australian women had won the right to vote in State parliamentary elections in 1894 and first exercised that right in 1896. A Women's War Work Depot operated in Sydney, possibly on similar lines to the League.

At one time League membership numbered 7000.² The League gave assistance to serving soldiers and their dependants, was interested to increase women's knowledge of accounting and domestic science and child welfare, and tried to encourage preference for goods produced and manufactured in the territories of the Empire and its allies. Among other of their works, its members packed boxes for overseas support in the basement of the Exhibition Building, North Terrace. The office was in Gawler Buildings, North Terrace.



The 'Trench Comforts Shop' — a direct appeal from the 'deserts of Egypt and the trenches of France'

Since 1915, Mrs Bee Lungley superintended the Central Trench Comforts Depot in the western basement of the Exhibition Building. Her band of workers made shirts, knitted socks, fashioned kid glove waistcoats (for which hundreds of kid gloves were needed), made caps for wearing under soldiers' steel helmets; and spent devoted hours sorting, grading, listing, packing, nailing and stencilling cases of goods, including foodstuffs, for ship transport to the Front.³

The League of Loyal Women's Trench Comforts Shop, with a green and white colour scheme, and its bulk receiving depot for home produce next door in Bowman's Arcade, King William Street (the 'work shop', produce, and cake sections), were for profit-making sales. The shop opened on 16 March 1917 at noon, free of rent due to Mr. Bowman's generosity. Workers and voluntary committee members were rostered in charge of shop opening hours, opening the doors at 8.30 a.m. to eager buyers.

In late autumn 1917 children of the Gumeracha School sent a huge bag of potatoes to the depot; two suburban schools made eighty cakes from ingredients collected from home by the students; and twelve live fowls came in a case of goods from Yankalilla.⁴ The managing committee made calls for almond growers to forward what nuts they could spare; home cooks sent 'oyster patties, cheese straws, lemon puffs and tarts, sausage rolls, and pies of all descriptions, besides cakes, brawn, and clotted cream';⁵ and a few weeks before

² South Australia's population in 1914 was 441, 690.

³ 'Central Trench Comforts Depot', *Mail*, 19 Oct 1918, p.9.

⁴ 'The Trench Comforts Shop', *Mail*, 5 May 1917, p.10.

⁵ 'The Trench Comforts Shop', *Mail*, 24 March 1917, p.11.

Christmas time, Christmas puddings, mince pies, and cakes as well as gifts 'stamped with the hallmark of daintiness and good taste' (dolls, pin cushions, and paper baskets, for example), were advertised for sale.⁶

For the year ending 13 March 1918, the League remitted to London £3,059 in support of soldiers at war; the total shop expenses totalled £306 and a small balance was kept in hand.⁷ Over its two years of operation, the Shop made some £10,099. The takings that were eventually forwarded overseas were regularly published in the newspapers. The Bowman Arcade shop closed in May 1919, at which time a 'big blank' was felt as it had created a demand for excellent home-made goods.⁸ Further opportunities for women's handiwork (especially cookery and hand-made garments) was sought, with the additional goal to help keep the League intact.⁹

Even when hostilities ceased, comforts were still needed for men on returning military transports, and the 'Shop', as it was known, only closed on 17 May 1919—with a final call for customers to return pie dishes before that date. It was decided in June 1919 to open a shop in Gawler Place.



The continuity of the types of home-produce sold, of women with the skills to apply to crafts, of willing customers, rostered workers, and a voluntary management committee, even if not the group effort and often 'raw' produce contributed by the community, saw the 'Shop' smoothly change its identity to become the 'Depot'.

In June 1920 the committee decided to open a shop where the gifts that women had devoted to Red Cross activities could be realised in peace-time. The purpose was to enable women to augment their incomes and incidentally to help financially the on-going work of the League of Loyal Women. In December 1922 the Bowman's Arcade shop closed as a

⁶ 'Trench Comforts Shop', *Mail*, 14 December 1918, p.14.

⁷ 'Patriotic Funds. Trench Comforts Shop', *Register*, 14 March 1918, p.8.

⁸ 'Women's Work Depot', *Mail*, 17 Apr 1920, p.12.

⁹ 'League of Loyal Women', *Register*, 23 November 1921, p.8. This reported the sixth annual meeting of the League.

concern of the League of Loyal Women, and opened in Gawler Place in the New Year as the Women's Work Depot.¹⁰

The first, almost militaristic, suggestions for the scheme to apply to contributing workers and the Depot's management, at the time when the committee was in search of suitable premises, were:

- ❖ A 2/6 annual membership subscription, payable in advance, before any work could be accepted. This was to be paid at the League's office in Gawler Chambers
- ❖ All branches of needlework, handicrafts, jams, pickles, and preserves, goods likely to find a sale, were wanted
- ❖ A high standard of work was essential, and the committee was able to reject work it believed was unsaleable: work was to be of the 'highest standard, unique and artistic'
- ❖ Workers could not be enrolled until their work quality had been approved by the committee
- ❖ Workers were to mark their own prices on goods, which the committee could query, and attach a slip stating the cost of materials
- ❖ Payments for work were to be made on one day only in the week, and a percentage deducted to cover working expenses (probably 20% in 1920)
- ❖ Cakes were to be sold on Fridays and Saturdays only
- ❖ Workers' names were made known to the committee only, and each worker was given a number

Goods were sold direct or by order, an arrangement to which was later added sale on consignment. Articles that were 'original and practical' were the Depot's staples, and a tradition of personal orders arose. The scheme of the League's committee in essence continued with the Women's Work Depot to its closing in 1986.

In April 1920, when the new branch, the Women's Work Depot, was approved, the thirteen-member League of Loyal Women committee and executive was:

Dr Gertrude Halley, Mrs Alfred Lendon, president, Mrs Arthur Lungley, Miss Kate Finlayson, Miss Ethel Wyatt, Miss Dorothy Gilbert, Miss Muriel Farr, Miss May Hill, Mrs Chittleborough, Miss Mabel Marryat, Mrs T.G.B. Osborn, Miss Lucy Lockett Ayers, the hon. treasurer, and Miss Phillips, the general secretary. The workers' representative was, probably at this early stage, Miss Margaret Gall.¹¹ The League went into recess at the end of 1922, ready should another national or similar crisis occur.

¹⁰ 'League of Loyal Women. First Recess Starts with New Year. Depot Taken Over by Workers', *Mail*, 23 Dec 1922, p.18.

¹¹ *Mail*, 17 April 1920, p.12.



The executive advertised:

Premises Wanted, City, within next two months, by League of Loyal Women, for workshop, depot, and office. Apply Secretary, Gawler Chambers, North Terrace (*Mail*, Saturday 17 April 1920, p.7)

The opening of the Women's Work Depot

The opening ceremony in July 1920 was performed by Lady Weigall, wife of the Governor, who was welcomed by Dr Gertrude Halley.¹² The League members, Lady Weigall said, were 'not only loyal to their God, their King, and their country, but to their fellow-women' in helping them establish the Depot. She added: there 'was in the world too much class distinction, too many cliques, too much petty jealousy, and it was their duty as loyal women to bring all sections into one circle.'¹³ The notion of self-less service during war-time modified to some degree into self-help and co-operation. And, certainly, what half a generation earlier had become known as the 'servantless age' remained influential in domestic economies.

Money-raising to establish the Depot in 1920 came from light-hearted activities—a 'Dansant' held in July 1920 from 3.30 in the afternoon to 6 pm in the evening at the popular Osborne

¹² 'Within a few months of her arrival in Adelaide, she became a leading member of the Women's Non-Party Political Association (later League of Women Voters), which sought to mobilize women politically on a variety of social issues. As chairwoman of the League of Loyal Women (in 1916-22) she sought to unite South Australian women of all classes in war work. In 1920 Gertrude became a founding member of the South Australian branch of the National Council of Women, was a committee-member for the first ten years and was convener of its standing committee on public health from 1927 to 1929.' (Elizabeth Kwan, 'Halley, Ida Gertrude Margaret (1867–1939)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/halley-ida-gertrude-margaret-6532/text11221>, accessed 12 September 2012). This article was first published in hardcopy in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 9, (MUP), 1983.

¹³ 'Women's Work Depot', *Mail*, 3 July 1920, p.12.

Hall in Gouger Street came soon after an earlier Dansant fund-raiser there;¹⁴ and social sports competitions, weight and hamper contents guessing, and estimating the number of peas in a jar all contributed to the funds.

To Mrs. K. MacDevitt, the secretary of thirty years of the Ladies Work Association of Melbourne, was owed the founding of the [Adelaide] Depot on 'sound workable lines.' In reply to questions from Adelaide, Mrs MacDevitt gave voluminous and detailed practical information on the management of the Association. 'The Adelaide committee gratefully adopted the advice.'¹⁵

By May 1920, intending members of the Women's Work depot were advised to enrol soon. Already excellent needlework had been received, more whitework was required, and knitters and cake makers were needed.¹⁶

To the end of 1920, an average of 1200 workers and some twenty voluntary administrators, including the advisory board, managed the Depot. Because commissions and other income was not covering costs well, the workers decided to form a company, the board continuing as an advisory body.

'Depot Taken Over by Workers'¹⁷ announced the *Mail* newspaper in 1922, fully aware of the stir its sensationalist headline's allusion to the Bolshevik revolution of but five years earlier would produce! The workers decided to recharge the Depot by taking over the shop as a co-operative enterprise. They resolved to charge one guinea membership fee, continue the 15% commission, and employ a paid secretary and saleswoman. The League's advisory board continued in an honorary role. The observation made in 1985 that the Depot 'allowed women to play golf all day and bridge all night' might have rung some truth, but the implied social divide was not so black and white.¹⁸

An average of sixty to 100 women of Adelaide joined with speed by 1922, paying 7/6d annual fee, able to 'augment their incomes by the sale of cakes, sweets, fancy work, and plain sewing', and being paid in total £5,000 from the £6,000 taken in the two years to the end of June 1922. All other work in controlling the business, except for a paid secretary, was voluntary.¹⁹

Neither leatherwork nor basketry was accepted by the Depot, as these competed with returned soldiers' rehabilitation handicrafts,²⁰ the 'artistic' handicrafts that played a central role in servicemen's convalescence and recovery. But hot cross buns, Christmas cakes and puddings could be ordered, cakes were never plentiful enough for the demand, and seasonal calls were made each November for empty jam jars for the coming fruit season.

In the early 1920s, from among those talented workers who made 'exquisite needlework' for the shop was probably the woman who took lessons in darning silk stockings (a suggestion

¹⁴ 'A[?] The Dansant', *Mail*, 19 June 1920, p.7.

¹⁵ 'Lady Kitty Says', *Advertiser*, 19 May 1932, p.14.

¹⁶ 'Women's Work depot', *Mail*, 22 May 1920, p.14.

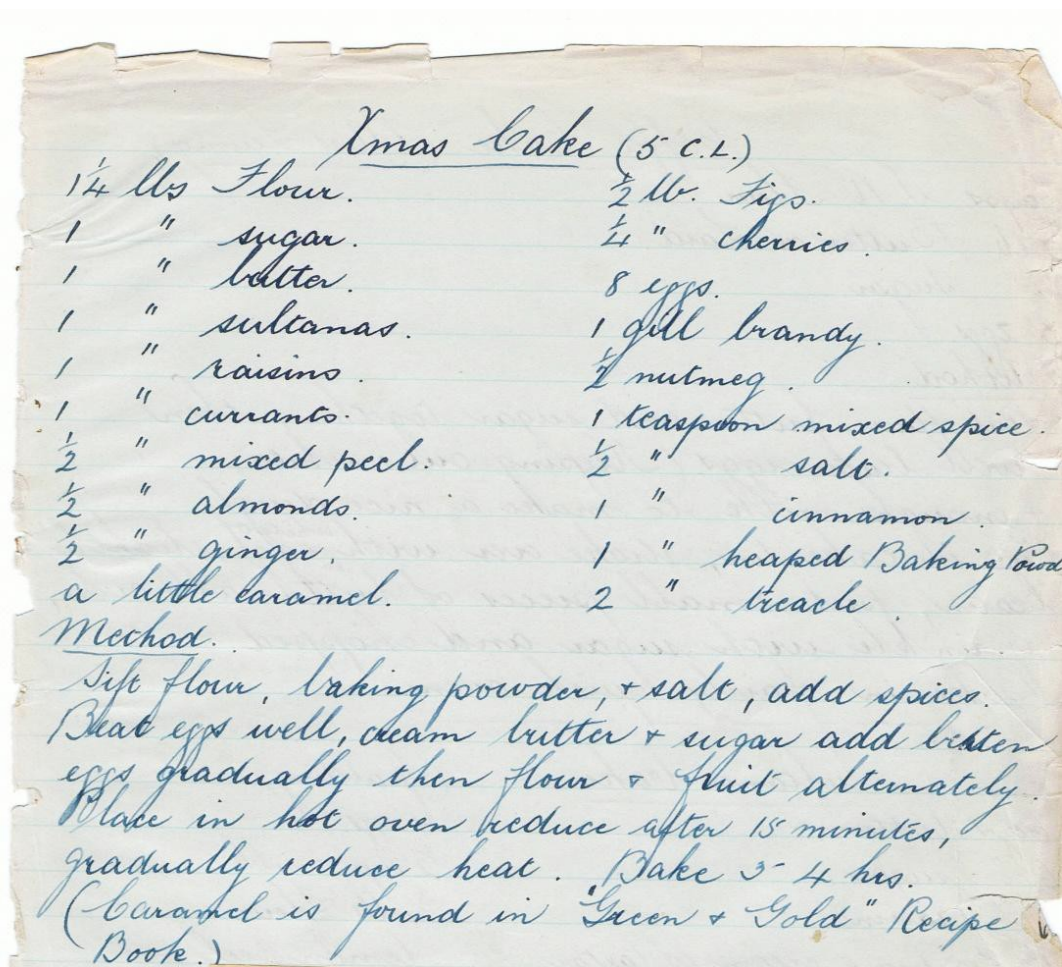
¹⁷ *Mail*, 23 December 1922, p.18.

¹⁸ Interview with Margaret Alison Henderson [1905-1983], interviewer R. Smith, SLSA: OH 21/4.

¹⁹ 'League of Loyal Women', *Mail*, 23 December 1922, p.18.

²⁰ 'Women's Work Depot', *Register*, 8 May 1923, p.7.

of Lady Bridges, wife of the Governor of South Australia—practising a continuation of vice-regal patronage or assistance that the School of Design's Art Needlework Society had enjoyed in the later nineteenth-century). Depot workers also hand-marked linen (by nib pen and indelible ink), and completed a government order for marking Government House linen. Even this early in the life of the Depot, serviceable and finely-embroidered underwear and dainty children's clothes were always looked for by customers. By 1923, with a distant member at Quorn in the Lower Flinders Range, the Depot was described as an 'institution', indeed, an organisation born from a labour of love and which was a fine 'aftermath of the comradeship of war work.'²¹



From Dorothy Kitto's mother's recipe books used over many years for her Women's Work Depot cooking (Courtesy of Dorothy Kitto)

The Depot held annual shows of Christmas gifts usually for nearly a month from early November. In the early days, Mrs Jack Bagot, 'yielding to the persuasion of her friends', with Miss Elinor Beaumont held displays of 'novel' Christmas gifts at the Women's Work Depot. This work included roll pincushions, thimbles, and telephone screens; bridge, shopping, and

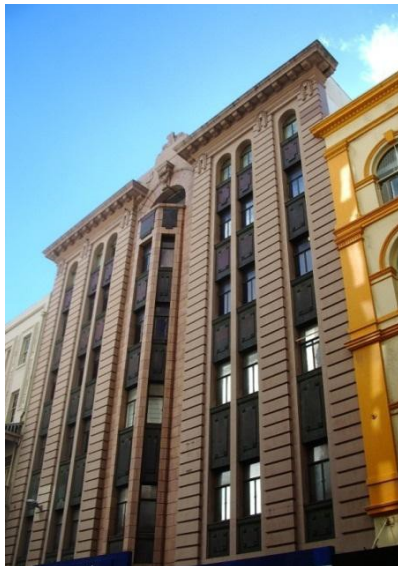
²¹ 'Women's Work Depot', *Register*, 8 May 1923, p.7.

laundry bags; and babies' clothes. Elinor Beaumont was known for her Priscilla Jackets, children's dressing gowns, tea cosies, and work bags.²² She had been secretary to the League of Loyal Women and in 1922 when it adjourned she became the social secretary of Adelaide's Palais Royal, a dance and entertainment hall on North Terrace that frequently held charity fund-raising occasions. These women may have supplied a model of what the Depot could successfully stock and sell, and their pre-Christmas displays no doubt augmented the Depot's income.

The Depot was at times entrepreneurial. The Balor Studio of Miss G. Lorimer and Miss Bertha C. Bates, newly-arrived from England, demonstrated hand weaving there in 1926.²³ They intended to teach South Australians hand-weaving and vegetable dyeing. Their hand-wrought silk, linen, and wool fabrics were on show at the Depot. Silk scarves, linen tray cloths and d'oyleys, dainty cases for embroidery silks and needles, hats covered with woven fabric, and cushion squares were among their offerings. It was seen as an advantage that linen or other fabrics could be ordered as a set with the same pattern. But these weavers soon left for Melbourne, citing high rents in Adelaide as the reason, and took their 'artistic homecraft' with them.²⁴

The Handicrafts Unemployed Sales Depot

At one time in the 1920s Gawler Place, near the Women's Work depot, was alive with handcraft outlets. Maude Prosser's Liberty Depot had been one of the earliest, from 1907. The Handicrafts Unemployed Sales Depot opened 1932 and was found on the second floor in Griffith Brothers Building, then it moved to 71A Gawler Place in 1939, near the YMCA Building, where its avowed impetus to improve design filled the rooms with pottery, needlework, basketware, green-glazed window boxes with trays, women's embroidered linens, raffia work, textile printing, and objects with wood inlay.



²² 'Christmas Gifts', *Advertiser*, 20 October 1923, p.17; 'Novel and Useful Gifts', *Register*, 23 October, 1923, p.10.

²³ 'Show of Hand Weaving', *Register*, 23 March 1926, p.3.

²⁴ 'Hand Weaving', *Register*, 24 March 1926, p.10; *Daily News* [Perth], 11 February 1926, p.8. They had hoped to teach at the School of Mines and Industries and at the School of Art.

The Women's Arts and Crafts Society of South Australia

In April 1914, the Women's Arts and Crafts Society of SA was established, and a year later it established a new branch, the Women's Home Handiwork. This shop received fine sewing such as trousseaux and children's clothes, and knitting. Members' annual subscription was five shillings. Its rooms were in Brookman's Buildings, Grenfell Street. It possibly arose from Red Cross war work, as perhaps had the newly-formed Women's Work Exchange that opened in autumn 1928 in Claridge House. The Exchange charged a small entrance fee and commission on sales.²⁵ In all else this seems to have modelled itself on the Depot, a scheme of operations that others followed.

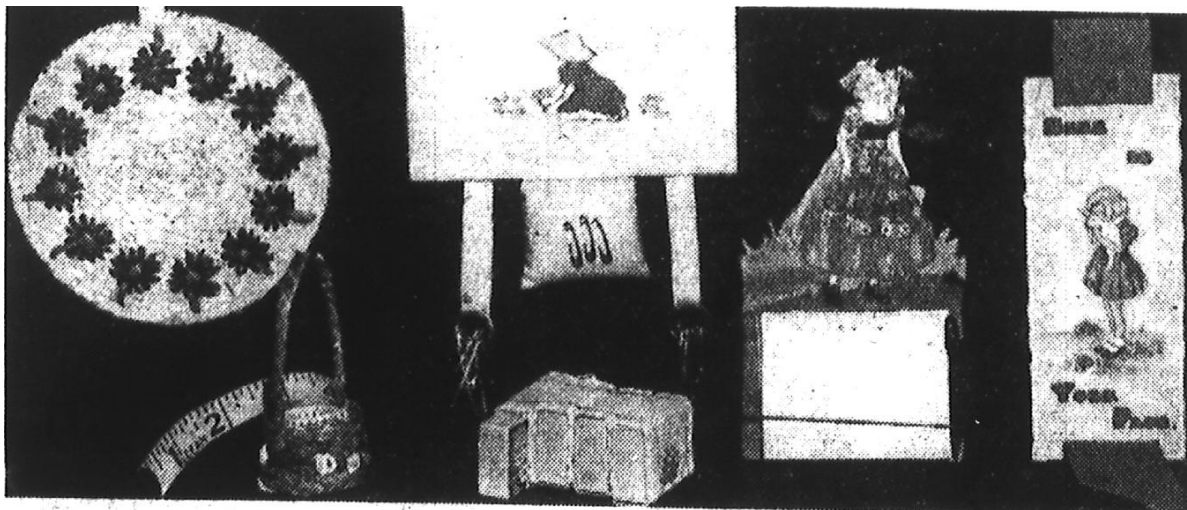
Even later, in 1936, for example, Miss Kate Finlayson and Miss Margaret Caterer opened The Babies' Shop at number 7, basement, Gawler Chambers. While overseas they had acquired stock of hand-made toys and 'nursery novelties', such as baby layettes and the 'first party frock', and displayed them for sale with gifts and babies' garments made by local craftswomen.²⁶ This shop continued in operation for some decades.



²⁵ 'Women's Work Exchange', *Register*, 9 March 1928, p.6.

²⁶ 'Babies Shop Opened', *Advertiser*, 23 June 1936, p.7.

In 1935, perhaps for the first time, the Depot proclaimed 'Parties are catered for'. Did the Depression years cause recourse to natural dyeing agents? Home-spun wool at the Depot in 1936 was dyed in walnuts, cochineal, toadstools, and onion skins, a foretaste of the 'back to nature' movements of the 1960s, but not unlike the colouring of lace in cold coffee and tea that a Depot worker did late in later years.



SOME work of the sixty or so expert needlewomen who made 'Gift articles' for the Women's Work Depot: a raffia kettle holder, nursery tidy, matches in a fancy-worked cover, shopping list, parchment bookmark, and tape measure in a raffia basket. In this year, 1938, the Depot made a feature of hand-knitted garments for all the fighting forces, while providing domestic 'equipment' such as nests of cotton reels set around a pin-cushion, flowered organdie handkerchief bags and matching duchess sets, the caped variety of lavender-perfumed coat hanger for protecting the top of frocks, cretonne-covered book rests, for which there 'is a continuous demand during the year', and appliqued children's aprons. The Depot had hand-made lingerie in spun silk and chiffon for sale in sets or individually.²⁷

The post-war Depot

Although food rationing was imposed on Australia during the War, the Depot managed regularly to send cakes and biscuits in tins and knitted garments overseas to fighting men and to the more severely rationed British people. By 1946 there were more than 100 members 'supplying goods and making up customers own material.' At this time, Miss Winifred (Win) Sullivan, the aunt of the Scott sisters, Mary and Clare, the long-time managers of the Depot, was the Depot's secretary.²⁸

In February 1948 the Gawler Place shop was completely remodelled, the far end of the shop being designed for children's and baby clothes and nursery accessories. Another section

²⁷ 'Novel Gifts for Overseas Friends', *Advertiser*, 8 November 1938, p.6. The committee then was Mesdames Alan Lendon, Cecil Fisher, and Lungley, and Misses L. Ayers, ay Hill, M. Turnbull, and Ethel Wyatt.

²⁸ 'Women's Work Depot', *Advertiser*, 17 April 1946, p.3.

..... The history continues in PART 2 of Women's Work Depot

.... Continuing from PART 1 of WOMEN'S WORK DEPOT

held lacquered table mats and hand-painted pottery. At this post-war time, the 'work-worn little shop' was modernised, with new cupboards and fittings, windows, and a cream colour-scheme. With a brisk efficiency the Depot emphasised that unless requested, *no* work other than cake was accepted on Fridays. Although the Depot's byword was 'an order refused often means a customer lost', goods were kept for a good three months before being removed from display if unsold. The committee at this time was Miss Madge Rymill (president), Mrs Alan Lendon (vice-president), Mesdames Cecil Fisher, M. Erichsen, Neil Hopkins, Clive Sangster, and Miss Jean Hussey, the workers' representative,²⁹ and probably the Jean Hussey who was in charge of the grand march of 500 girls on Wayville Oval in October 1931 during the YWCA Inter-house Sports Carnival. The member number one allocated to founding Depot worker Jean Hussey, well-respected in the Red Cross, was never allocated to another worker.



Stuffed felt horse bought from the Women's Work Depot the late 1960s or early 1970s
(Courtesy of Deirdre Scott)

²⁹ 'The Idea Started in World War I.', *Mail*, 7 August 1948, p.19.



Stuffed felt kangaroo with joey. Probably about 1980 (Courtesy of Sheana Davies)

By 1951 the call for workers went out again, the 'vacancies' said to provide an 'opportunity for convalescent polio patients or invalids'.³⁰ And as the years rolled on, some highly-valued Depot needle-workers who were physically incapacitated in various ways found their craft contribution a godsend, and certainly a reciprocal one. In the 1970s, a 'tall elegant policeman' used to come every Friday with his wife's needlework, usually Pooh toys and smocking, in a brown paper bag; she had very limited mobility and certainly was unable to move very far from home. Another woman, struck by cancer, already a fine needlewoman, found that smocking became her 'saviour' for eight years. By 1955, the Depot contributions were advised as an income supplement for those 'handicapped' by home duties and care of young children. A new public service was started at this time, a 'parcels depot', where busy shoppers could leave their parcels at the Depot while they went to a picture show, had lunch in town, or to enable them to 'cope with more shopping'.³¹

³⁰ 'Vacancies at Work Depot', *Advertiser*, 1 March 1951, p.11.

³¹ *Advertiser*, 11 Aug 1955, p.11.



A tradition developed of 'personal orders', special orders for food and clothes; fabric repairs were often done, and handiwork was completed by Depot workers. A cushion cover (below) embroidered by Peggy Ayers was attached and finished by the Depot's workers.



Needlework medallion applied to a cushion.
(Embroiderers' Guild Museum: 2012.028. Donated by Jane and John Ayers).

Post-war birth increases saw the Depot calling for more good cooks, 'fine needle-workers [and] neat knitters' of all sorts of garments, and particularly women who could smock and make children's clothes. The annual membership fee by this time was five shillings.³²

³² 'Make Money at Home', *Advertiser*, 26 May 1953, p.9.



After 40 years in Gawler Place

Alterations to the building site in Gawler Place forced this 'landmark for women shoppers wanting handmade goods of a high standard' to move from city south. The Depot opened at 34 O'Connell Street, North Adelaide, on Friday 4 March 1960. The 200 members needed to adjust geographically, and the call went out for women who could do excellent repair work to join the band.³³

³³ 'Depot to Get New Address', *Advertiser*, 1 March 1960, p.20.



Mary Scott with Winnie the Pooh and Tigger at the Women's Work Depot in 1981. Those who ran the Depot were very 'agreeable gentlewomen', dedicated and professional, although perhaps they would now be described as old-fashioned and 'proper'. The Scott sisters, Mary and Clare, two of several sisters, came from Mt Leonard Station which their father managed. Mary Scott looked after the office, and Clare the shop, but their roles often interchanged.

Some memories of the Depot, its 'jewels and treasures'

- ❖ 'You could hear the YMCA!'

During the 1930s to 1950s, Victoria Hall, the YMCA Building, hosted Boy Week hobby shows, installed during the day, daytime musical recital rehearsals, physical culture exercises, including volley ball and weightlifting demonstrations, as well as fellowship gatherings during the lunch hour, and at night-times pigeon and canary shows, also open during day hours. Most activities were directed to attract lunchtime visitors, and all must have kept the Depot on its toes.
- ❖ 'Just to go in to the Depot and buy a linen hand hem-stitched handkerchief was wonderful'.
- ❖ One country-born woman who had been clothed in the Depot's smocked dresses when young, later made eight-inch sponge cakes weekly, with eight eggs, jam and cream, and from her sales to the Depot saved enough to pay for a two-week stay in a London hotel. For her winning sponges she used the recipe learned at Invergowrie

Homecraft Hostel that was established in 1929 by the Association of Headmistresses of Independent Schools of Victoria, and which closed in 1973.

- ❖ A collection of pieces sent from Tasmania to be joined as a quilt took weeks and weeks of work, for which the Depot received a letter of appreciation.
- ❖ A work of hexagonal English paper piecing was adorned by florettes fashioned from Chux wipes.



- ❖ Winifred Sullivan³⁴ 'did the wages'; she checked the ledger book every Friday like clock-work, running her finger down every column and across every row without stopping as her swift mental arithmetic justified each total. Win also contacted workers about special orders. Winifred's nieces and nephews worked behind the scenes in their school holidays: they folded and filled boxes, ran messages, and were paid with mince pies and Christmas cakes. The Depot in Gawler Place was 'like a family', especially as aunties, sisters, and cousins worked for the Depot.
- ❖ Lady Mayo was worker no. 2. As time went on, the numbers did not equate with membership place, but no.1 was never re-allocated.
- ❖ A motto card sewn onto mothball mice stated 'Put me in your drawer and moths you'll see no more.'
- ❖ Worker no. 48 made small down-filled cushions of Swiss batiste, exquisitely embroidered with old lace added, that were 'mostly spoken for by the time she finished.'
- ❖ Mrs Muriel (Doreen) Markey managed the needlework business at the Depot, listened to what customers wanted, made suggestions to workers, and advised management on coming trends. Remembered as 'a natural, a lovely person', Mrs Markey was the Depot's 'final word in needlework'.

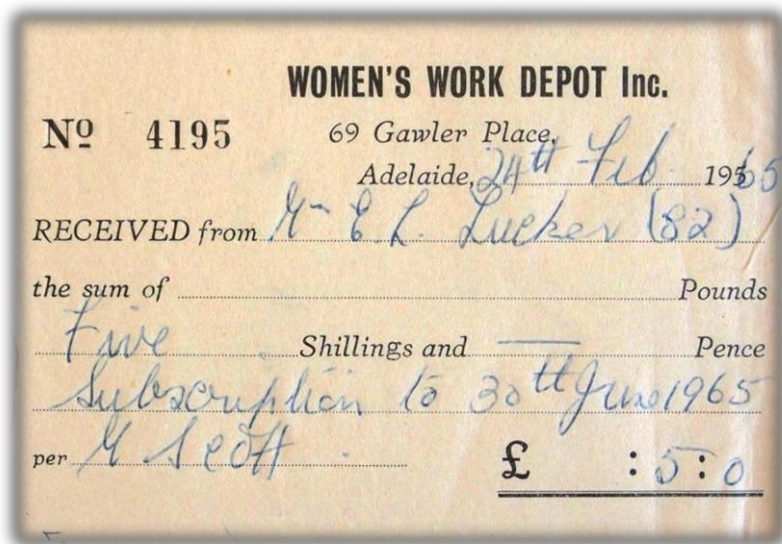
³⁴ Win Sullivan was active in the old scholars' association of Sisters of St Joseph School, Adelaide.

..... The history continues in PART 3 of Women's Work Depot

... Continued from PART 2 of WOMEN'S WORK DEPOT

- ❖ Pink and blue were gender specific perennial clothes colours, and 'lemon' was provided for the unsure. Navy and red were later popular colours for older children and were unisex.
- ❖ There was always a lovely display of products in the window of the handmade clothing section of the shop.
- ❖ A former secretary of the Depot recalled arranging the lovely colours of mint jelly, crab apple jelly, and quince jelly on the ledge inside the plate glass windows on O'Connell Street.

Some forty years earlier, to mark the intended coronation of Edward VIII, the Gawler Place shop windows were decked in red, white and blue Turkish Delight, a petit point Union Jack pincushion, and a tricolour Shetland wool shawl and scarf. Needlewomen and cooks rose to the occasion: the icing of fruit and light-mix cakes sported red and blue stars and gold and scarlet crowns; linen bibs bore appliqued flags; and tall scarlet candles were held in silver sticks.³⁵



- ❖ The doll named Rose de Peace was handmade by Miss Rene Brittain in 1945. The head is of hand-painted papier maché and real hair, and the body, with moveable arms and legs, is made of felt. During the 'Austerity Days' of World War II, Rene Brittain made many other dolls which were sold at the Women's Work Depot, Gawler Place. She needed to have a permit to make toys after having satisfied the Department of Manpower that she was unable to undertake essential war work. To make each papier maché head required five pages of the *Advertiser* and Miss Brittain recalled that 'There were many sad war stories that went into those heads'.
- ❖ Pearl Sobels produced items for the Gawler Place and North Adelaide Women's Work Depot. Pearl Sobels did not do embroidery, rather she sewed items for the Depot such as dolls' clothes (some were velvet theatre costumes), which were often ordered from cattle stations; little cosmetics purses; quilted chintz bags; and head pillows in the late 1950s and 1960s. Pearl and her sister created flowers (button centred Suffolk puffs) from gathered material with pipe-cleaner stems and fabric leaves, that were placed in plastic pots. The Depot sold hundreds of these.

³⁵ 'Coronation in Needlecraft', *Advertiser*, 12 May 1937, p.6.



- ❖ Miss Hubble made children's booties that were 'tested under baby conditions' and could not be kicked off.
- ❖ We were 'flat strap from go to whoa on Fridays' and of course Christmas-time was 'frantic'.
- ❖ There was no Women's Work Depot logo. The 'only thing that changed was the 'phone number—over time they added and added digits'.
- ❖ Most workers, with their own specialities, stayed with the Depot for their working life. When they retired the Depot often asked if their patterns or recipes could be given to another worker to use.
- ❖ Regular Depot customers knew the days that particular goods came in: Mrs Woods' apricot oysters were sought after, Mrs Bowman's pickled onions were renowned, and Mrs Jackman, who at 85 years cleaned her house gutters, made a signature cumquat jam.
- ❖ Mrs Chapman made fruit cakes, and when she died aged 91 had a cake for the Depot baking in her oven.

(Sheana Davies, Jennifer Sullivan, and Katherine Welling are especially thanked for their reminiscences during 2012 of the Depot and its workers)

'articles that are original and practical'

The Depot's system for workers written of in 1946 was in almost all respects the one with which the Depot began: monthly payments for the work sold less a commission (in the post-war 1940s this was 22½ per cent); an annual membership fee (five shillings); members were given a number and kept books to record articles, prices, and the date brought to the Depot; every article was to have a ticket sewn on to it before being brought to the Depot; and no

work other than cake was accepted on Fridays—unless especially asked for.

The Depot ran a purchase account for goods it bought direct from certain workers, and followed a rigid system of payment days and times for the varieties of goods.

\$3-25-	19" Baby Cardigan	PLiving Doll 8002	
	2 Balls Patons B/Wool @ 34c ball.		.68
	4 Buttons	SOLD.	.08
	TAKEN IN 15th APRIL 1969		.76
\$12-00	Frock & Panties - 5yrs.	Simp 6147	
	2 1/2 yds Floral Clydella @ \$1.75 yd.		4.38
	Sheen, Emb cotton, Smocking Dots	25c.	.40
	6 Buttons @ 2c ea, Elastic, 1/4 yd lace @	1c yd.	.32
		SOLD.	\$5.10
\$11-00	Frock & Panties 2yrs.	Simp 5847	
	2 yds floral vinella @ \$2.50 yd		5.00
	Sheen, Emb cotton, Smocking Dots	10c.	.25
	2 Buttons, Press-stud, Elastic, 1 yd lace		.20
	TAKEN IN 23rd APRIL 1969	SOLD.	\$5.45
\$11.75	Frock & Panties 3yrs	Simp 6147	
	2 1/2 yds Clydella @ \$1.75 yd.		4.38
	Sheen, Emb cotton, 6 Buttons @ 2c ea.		.22
	Elastic, 1/4 yd lace @ 2c yd.		.20
		SOLD.	\$4.80
	TAKEN IN 7th MAY 1969		

A page from Eunice Tucker's Women's Work Depot record book. 1969 (Courtesy of Eunice Tucker)

Originally from Murray Bridge, in 1965 Eunice Tucker came to Adelaide as a young woman of twenty-five with two small children from Curramulka, York Peninsula. She soon heard about the North Adelaide Women's Work Depot, and her long association with it 'grew from

there'. Eunice's mother, who was from The Mallee country, did fancy work, particularly in the 1930s, including fine stem and bullion stitches, and made supper cloths and duchess sets, greatly admired by Eunice, who did basic primary school sewing. But, she was self-taught in needlework; her talent was innate and her skill extraordinary. Eunice first made bloomers for the Depot and was soon asked if she did smocking. She was given number 82. When, after full-time work, she later returned to sewing for the Depot, her new number was 181. Eunice did some wool embroidery on baby blankets, yet her fort  was smocking on Viyella, Swiss cotton, and Clydella, materials that she was introduced to by the Depot, and commissions soon flowed for her work. Sometimes customers supplied the material they wished to have made up, and Eunice often worked to 3 a.m. to finish work for the Depot. She found Swiss cotton 'a dream to work with'; but after the closure of the Depot when Eunice made work for another crafts retailer, she was very anxious when working on Liberty fabrics that had been brought back to Adelaide. It was closely woven and quite different to work because of that. The end of the Depot certainly brought different kinds of challenges.

Eunice found Mary Scott daunting because stern at times, but an admirable person, and she confessed that it 'took a lot of courage to go through that door!' but it 'opened up a lifetime of stitching for me'.



Eunice Tucker. Boy's smocked romper suit.

Eunice Tucker. Girl's smocked floral dress, with a deliberately deep hem to enable lengthening with growth. This was unsold at the Depot when it closed, and afterwards served four of Eunice's grand-daughters.



One of a pair of curtains. Embroideries on silk bought by Mrs John (Peggy) Ayers at auction a few decades ago in a 'job lot', at the time were less desired than another piece, but they came to life again in the 'reclamation work' of Mrs Prosser, a Depot worker, who found it an exacting and difficult exercise, but highly successful, to appliqué the needlework to antique curtain material.³⁶ (Courtesy of Jane and John Ayers)

³⁶ Certain of Peggy Ayers' handcrafts are illustrated in 'A New Life', *Vogue Living*, vol. 18, no. 3, April 1984.



Details of the embroideries applied onto silk curtain material



..... The history continues in PART 4 of Women's Work Depot

... Continued from PART 3 of WOMEN'S WORK DEPOT





Mrs Z. Narburgs (Depot worker no. 289) worked this carpet with the Ayers' family crest, left in 1984 and with Mrs John Ayers she worked a large canvas work carpet (below) designed by the South Australian artist Jacqueline Hick (1919-2004)
(Courtesy of Jane and John Ayers)



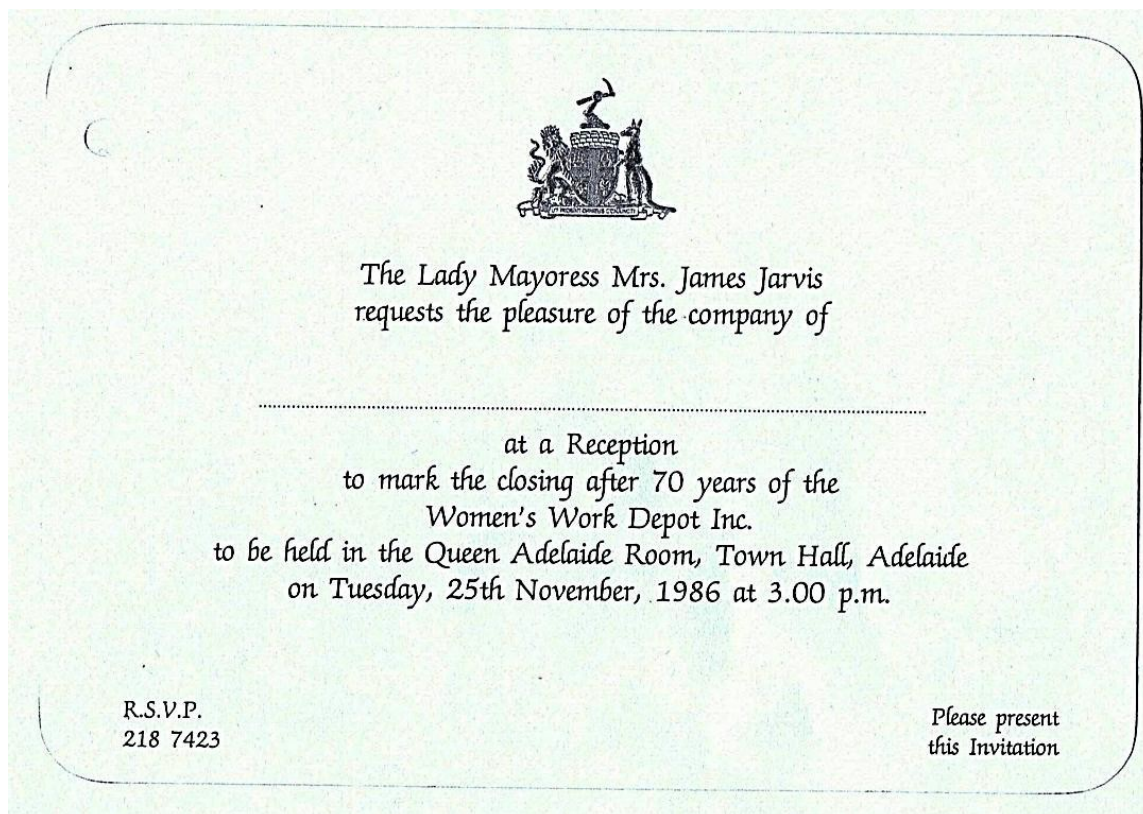
The Depot arranged with G. and R. Wills, wholesale importers, to buy in bulk fabrics, embroidery cottons (usually Anchor brand), Coates Patons wools, and buttons, that workers could buy from the Depot in certain quantities. Yet an import duty imposed on wool and cotton fabrics such as Clydella and Tootalene made the Depot's purchasing difficult.

The Lady Mayoress's reception to mark the closing of the Women's Work Depot

In 1986, an afternoon tea reception at the Adelaide Town Hall marked the closing 'after 70 years of the Women's Work Depot Inc.' Strictly, the Depot was not established in 1916, but was begun in April 1920, but the '70 years' acknowledged its intended and seamless birth from the League of Loyal Women. The Depot had regularly filled orders mainly for fresh biscuits for Town Hall events, but perhaps not on this occasion.

The Depot attempted to re-structure and it tried to place its workers with other handcraft outlets. But by the time the Depot closed there were fewer workers making the kind of items people still asked for, the quality associated with the Depot became harder to maintain, and competition from small operations such as 'country style' tables and the new vogue for 'calico and lace' that 'popped up like measles'—a decided change in the culture of needlework—made the Depot's closure permanent. Children's clothing was becoming 'adult fashions cut down to size' and jeans and T-shirts the norm.³⁷

The Depot donated its curve-fronted cupboards to the Lutheran Archives, at that time in a building around the corner from the Depot in North Adelaide. It is uncertain where the Depot's records and ledger books have finally rested.



Invitation to a reception at the Town Hall, November 1986
(Adelaide City Archives: file A11037:01).

³⁷ Reminiscence of Sheana Davies.

Of the people associated with the Depot, 180 were able to be invited to the reception, 121 accepted, 23 regretted their inability to attend, and 117 attended the afternoon tea on 25 November 1986.³⁸ At the time, members were from almost every suburb in metropolitan Adelaide, including Warradale, Gilberton, Medindie, Paradise, Wattle Park, Glenelg, Elizabeth Field, and from outer metropolitan and rural towns such as Angaston, Aldinga, Echunga, Aldgate, Mylor, and Broken Hill. Workers rarely ran into one another, and there were many surprises and delights when their 'anonymity' was lifted at this reception.

Women's Work Depot Staff in the late years–

Misses Clare and Mary Scott

Mrs Sheana Davies (the secretary, who once a month attended governing meetings, took minutes, calculated pay and drew monthly cheques for members; collated needlework weekly, then monthly, deducted commissions; and 'mopped and cleaned windows')

Miss Wilma Knobben (who started as a junior of 17 or 18 years)

Mrs J. Beauchamp (who joined the staff towards the end)

Mrs Anne Eglinton

Mrs H. Brown

Mrs Doreen Markey.³⁹

Mrs Nancy Irving Sheriff

?Judith Heaven

Miss Lisa A. Law (a junior)

Bob Duncan Alexander, of Ewens and Alexander, audited the Depot books.⁴⁰

³⁸ 'Reception to Mark the Closing of the Women's Work Depot–25.11.86', file A11057, Adelaide City Archives.

³⁹ Mrs Muriel Doreen Markey was awarded OAM for services to community: Supervisor, Unley Kitchen Meals on Wheels; Member, Good Neighbour Council; Women's Work Depot.
<<http://users.adam.com.au/saorderofaust/Members/MembersM.html>>.

⁴⁰ Vivienne Alexander, pers. Comm., 10 September 2012.



The dark green blinds of the Women's Work Depot, 34-36 O'Connell Street, North Adelaide, in 1976 (North Adelaide Historical Society, Photographic Survey of North Adelaide. Adelaide City Archives: 6370.SEC18A.007).

Although there were look-alikes, such as the Women's Work Depot at Belair in the 1950s that mainly handled second-hand school uniforms, and the Women's Work Depot at Mount Gambier, that is based on the constitution and rules of the Tatiara Women's Work Centre at Bordertown, no organisation carrying the name Women's Work Depot produced the kind of history and achievements of what began in Adelaide as the League of Loyal Women's 'Shop'.

