

Matilda L. Thompson (Tilly) nee Clennell.

Born Wendouree 28th April 1871.

Tilly left school aged 13 yrs, then worked in drapers shops becoming a buyer in 1905, joining the firm of Lucas and becoming Ballarat's first woman to obtain a drivers license and Australia's first Commercial traveller promoting sales throughout Southern Australia. In 1915 she married William Daniel Thompson, after his first wife had died in 1913 leaving him with six children.

During the 1st. World War she would take the girls in the Lucas Factory from their machines to hand out comforts and sing choruses when troop trains drew in and out of the Ballarat station. She became a Director of the firm in 1915. The Lucas Girls supported a YMCA worker at the front and sent comfort parcels.

Probably at her suggestion she the Avenue of Honour was commenced and the Arch of Victory with the enthusiastic involvement of the Lucas girls in all sorts of activities. At the opening they famously presented the Prince of Wales with a pair of pyjamas (the subject of a recent request to Buckingham Palace as to its whereabouts.)

She travelled overseas to study fashion trends and machine development during her working years and following her husband's death in 1927 and her retirement she travelled overseas extensively. Her original home was "Homeleigh" on Wendouree Parade, she later built "Sunways" in 1939. She remained very active in Charities and an active member of the Jubilee Church. She was a great friend of Tom Toop and a frequent visitor to the Gardens. She was awarded an MBE in 1941. She died on 7th April 1959 at the age of 87 and was buried at the Ballarat Old Cemetery.

Her Memorial Garden is surrounded by plaques from service organizations such as the Rats of Tobruk and the Air Force plus one recording the names of Lucas employees who served and died in the World Wars.

John Garner June 2009

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