# Context

The primary source for the analysis documented by the indefatigable Elsie Holmes is entitled the ‘Busy Bees Album’ created by Swallow and Ariell Pty. Ltd., a prominent biscuit manufacturing company in Melbourne. This document was established during the period of World War I (1914-1918). Under the Australian conscription referendum, troops from Australia had been sent to aid the Allies. This document was based on the charitable fund-raising events held in predominantly South Melbourne and these funds were used to send comforting merchandise to the boys in blue at the front.

The scrapbook contains photographs, pamphlets, invitation and greeting cards, a variety of sample badges, tickets and medals. This information is valuable as it depicts how in times of such turmoil Elsie Holmes, the Busy Bees, female employees of Swallow and Ariell along with volunteers of the Melbourne public kept the spirits of the ones at home alive whilst generating funds to support the ones at the front.

The industrious and unwearying Elsie Holmes was the founder, president and Hon. Secretary of the Busy Bees. She kept a record of numerous activities that had taken place within that time span. This could be referenced by historians in the future and for the Busy Bees own contentment.

# Analysis

It is evident through each of the scrapbook articles that along with the Busy Bees name, Swallow and Ariell Pty. Ltd. was closely knit, as it was its main supporter. Without their support, the Busy Bees would probably not have been.

Elsie Holmes seemed a charismatic personality who accelerated patriotic fervour to its bounds through fundraising campaigns that entertained as well as created enormous volunteers and funds leading to plentiful Christmas gifts for our troops and other allies.

During the period of 1914 to 1918, she envisioned that the need of the time was to keep hopes up at home and at the frontline. Hence umpteen novelty nights, masquerade balls were held at prominent places such as the South Melbourne Town Hall. The Funds collected from these events were used by the Busy Bees for acquiring and making goods to bring solace to their men at war.

“Women employees, the ‘Busy Bees’, were organised by the company to prepare hampers and comfort parcels containing the firm’s products for the troops, as well as to make garments for the soldiers. The ‘Busy Bees’ also assisted fundraising for wounded soldiers by collecting donations at Swallow and Ariell football matches.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

In one citation of a newspaper heading “Bee Girls First Ball of the season”- mentioned that over a thousand people had turned over[[2]](#footnote-2). This implicated turnover along with the photographs from the scrapbook are testimony enough of the entertainment rendered and the funds endeared. Numerous processions and rallies were held during this period, where the Busy Bees participated in horse driven carriages, displaying their work. The carriages had slogans written upon them that were symbolic of the undaunting support they offered. Elsie and the Busy Bees held many competitions for young and old such as sock knitting, garment making, fancy dress amongst many others. The chosen judges, i.e. Hon. F.J. Derham, managing Director of Swallow and Ariell, Mrs. F.J. Derham, A.C. Derham, etc. were quite prominent personalities which indicated how strongly connected she was. All this also led to immense community involvement, volunteer work, etc. once again bringing in ample proceeds.

The innovative ideas of the women were brilliant, how they utilized old worn stockings to make socks, skullcaps and tunics. They accomplished their tasks nimbly. It was mentioned that by Nov. 1917, they had made 1,547 leather cardigans, 23,461 cardigan handkerchiefs, 1,474 pairs of socks amongst many other things[[3]](#footnote-3). Elsie and the Bees applied themselves and demonstrated tenacious teamwork.

“As a result of not being able to serve in the armed forces and limited jobs available, many women turned their attention to charity work. Some of these charities included the Australian branch of the British Red Cross, an organisation predominantly staffed by middle-class women whose main task was to compile packages that contained luxury items such as soap and toiletries as well food and games for the men who were serving overseas.”[[4]](#footnote-4). Elsie and the Busy Bees were one of the groups working in collaboration with the Red Cross.

The Christmas hamper, billies, stockings sent out to the troops each year, consisted of varied items, including garments, cakes, biscuits, cold meats, puddings, raisins, to mention a few. These were often personalized to the boys in blue form Melbourne with their no. and names, along with greeting cards with affectionate and motivating messages and photograph in the scrapbook shows men enjoying the much-appreciated treats and raising their hopes and spirits. Mementos of medals, badges, invitation, entry, greeting cards have been preserved in this scrapbook. These are highly informative as to how Elsie Holmes collaborated the Busy Bees of the Swallow and Ariell group to do justice to their endeavours and achieve all that they had.

Nov. 11th, 1918 was celebrated as Armistice Day, where all were surely elated and satisfied

with their efforts for the cause. Swallow and Ariell announced leave with pay for the staff. The cover of the scrapbook has tricolour ribbon on both sides, symbolic of her support of the Allies.

The atmosphere prevailing during that period was despondent, Folks at home felt devastated at the thought of seeing their family members go to the front. Had it not been for people like Elsie Holmes who brought out liveliness and productivity with a purpose, the war would have been lost.

# Evaluation

The Busy Bees Album exhibits that Elsie Holmes had catalogued the various ways in which Swallow and Ariell’s Busy Bees provided a fair share of contribution to the Australian troops as well as the allies. In the process, they entertained the masses, young and old, who else would have been under depression. She lifted the spirits of those around her and got them to be involved productively.

The scrapbook needed immense time in interpreting as the events were not in any chronological order. Fitting the pieces together was like completing a jigsaw puzzle but the satisfaction at the end was pleasurable.

History has offered colossal foresight for generations as to how to refrain from vices and supervene the humaneness acts, such as those of the dexterous Elsie Holmes. In all certainty, the scrapbook is full of ideas as to how we too can achieve positivity and productiveness to empower our situation, nation and the World.

1. Peter Burke, A social history of workplace in Australian football (2008) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. “Novelty Night”, Port Melbourne Standard, July 8, 1916. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. “The War in Port-1917”,Janet Bolitho, December 19, 2017, http://www.pmhps.org.au/2017/12/the-war-in-port-1917/ [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. “The Role of Women in WW1”, https://womeninww1sam.weebly.com/womens-involvement-in-the-war.html [↑](#footnote-ref-4)