

Agnes Macready

Born in 1855 at Rathfriland, County Down, Agnes Macready was the eldest of five children of Presbyterian minister, Reverend Henry Macready, and his wife Jane. In 1867, when Agnes was 12, the family emigrated to Australia. As an adult, Agnes converted to Catholicism, a move described by the *Methodist* newspaper in these terms: '[S]he wandered from green pastures of truth into the enchanted ground of Popery, and is ardent as perverts usually are'. A manifestation of her alleged perverted ardour for popery was her contribution from 1898 of literary sketches and verse to the Sydney Irish-Catholic newspaper the *Catholic Press* for whom she wrote under the name 'Arrah Luen'.

In 1880 Agnes had commenced training as a nurse at Sydney's Prince Alfred Hospital, after which she worked at Melbourne Hospital before being appointed matron of Bowral Hospital in New South Wales. When war broke out in South Africa in 1899 Macready volunteered to serve as a nurse. But her request was denied. Undeterred, she paid her own passage to Durban and was the first nurse from Australia to arrive there. But not only was she the first Australian nurse at the Boer War, she also became Australia's first-ever female war correspondent.

Having been commissioned by the *Catholic Press* to send back reports on the war, she wrote that she saw the war 'with a woman's eyes'. Women war correspondents would later challenge the idea that they should cover war only from the so-called 'woman's angle'. But, unlike her male counterparts, Agnes was not permitted to visit the front. Nevertheless, as a nurse, her reports had a certain power that came from the unique perspective from which she wrote:

And being a woman I feel that I want to cry, for it does not fall to my lot to see any of the 'glory of war'; it is mine only to look upon the maimed limbs, the ghastly wounds, the suffering, the after results of an engagement be it a victory or a defeat. And being a woman I feel that I want to cry, too, for the Dutch woman on her lonely farm beyond the veldt, whose grey-haired husband and little son, scarce strong enough to hold the rifle, died together in the trenches yesterday morning. For Rachael is weeping for her children 'on both sides of the sea'.

The *Catholic Press* was clearly pleased with Macready's reports, claiming they were 'beautiful and pathetic' and 'are acknowledged to be among the best war correspondence published here or in the old world'.

After almost two years in South Africa, Macready was invalided home to Australia. After recovering her health she travelled to Ireland from where she sent literary sketches to the *Catholic Press*. On return to Australia she resumed her nursing career in outback New South Wales.

During the 1916 conscription campaign the *Catholic Press* was one of the few anti-conscription newspapers in Australia and Agnes regularly contributed articles addressed to women in which she opposed what she called 'the vivid scarlet sin of conscription', with headlines such as: 'The Curse of Conscription that Overshadows Australia' and 'The Fate of Your Household: Will the Evil Day Dawn'. During the 1917 conscription campaign Agnes once again warned women of the dangers of conscription.

Macready continued to contribute articles and poems to the *Catholic Press* up until her death in 1935. She died in Sydney and is buried at Rookwood Cemetery.

Bella Guerin

From 'imperialistic butterfly' to 'democratic grub' is how Bella Guerin described her political evolution during her life of 65 years. Born Julia Margaret Guerin in 1858 at Williamstown, Victoria, she was the daughter of Patrick Guerin of County Clare, a prison guard who later became governor of Ballarat Gaol, and Julia Margaret née Thearney of Dublin.

Bella Guerin is not an easy person to trace through time because of numerous name changes. First, Julia Margaret came to be known as Bella, and second, she married twice, on each occasion taking her husband's surname despite her feminist leanings. However, her marriages were unconventional in other ways. In 1891 at age 33 Bella Guerin became Bella Halloran when she married the 80-year-old civil servant and poet Henry Halloran. He died two years later, leaving her with an 8-month-old son, Henry, whom she had to raise without her parents' assistance as both had died. In October 1909 Bella Halloran, aged 51, became Bella Lavender when she married George d'Arcie Lavender, thirty years her junior. That marriage was short-lived, and they separated.

Bella Guerin is perhaps best known for the fact she was the first woman to graduate from an Australian university, having been awarded a Bachelor of Arts degree by Melbourne University in December 1883. Two years later she received a Master of Arts degree. An impressive achievement, all the more remarkable for the fact that as a child she was educated at home by her mother.

Upon graduation Bella began a career in teaching at Loreto Convent in Ballarat and then at the Ballarat School of Mines. In 1898 she founded her own school, University College, at Bendigo where she taught students for matriculation. As well as teaching she also contributed articles and poems to literary journals. She was an advocate of women's suffrage, which was not finally realised across Australia until 1908, when Victoria became the last state to give women the vote.

After the failure of her marriage to George Lavender she increasingly concentrated on politics and the women's movement. She gave lectures on women's issues with many of her talks reported in publications such as *Labor Call* and *The Socialist*, becoming in 1912 vice-president of the Women's Political Association, of which Vida Goldstein was president. In 1913 Guerin co-authored an election manifesto and biographical portrait in support of Goldstein's bid for election to parliament. On the outbreak of the First World War she became more outspoken and more radical, leading the Labor Women's Anti-Conscription Fellowship and speaking at meetings in Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia.

In 1916 Bella was appointed vice-president of the Woman's Central Organizing Committee of the Labor Party, formed for the purpose of organizing and educating the women of Victoria politically and industrially. However, she soon fell out of favour with party elders after giving a lecture critical of the party's treatment of its women members entitled, 'Women in the Labor Party: Poodle of Packhorse?'. After the war she continued to move further to the left, lecturing at socialist meetings and on the Yarra Bank, where she was arrested for flying the red flag.

In the early 1920s she moved to Adelaide to live with her son Dr Henry Halloran, who practised medicine there. She died in 1923 and is buried in the West Terrace Cemetery.