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**JESSIE MARY VASEY C.B.E. 1897-1966**

“Yet it is no mean destiny to be called upon to go on for a man who laid down his life, as Christ did, to save mankind from the power of the Beast. Our husbands fought against hopeless odds and overcame them; we can do the same for, from their sacrifice, will come our strength. It rests with us, the war widows, to make our Guild a power in the land” - so wrote Jessie Mary Vasey, the founder of the War Widows' Guild of Australia, after the death of her husband Major-General George Vasey.

Jessie Mary Halbert was born at Roma, Queensland on 19 October 1897. Jessie was the eldest of three children, all girls.

Her father Joseph Halbert, originally from Victoria, was a pastoralist with a large property at Mitchell where Jessie spent her early years. She shared her father's love of the bush, and particularly horses and in some ways took the role of a son. Jessie was always close to her father, not only did she ride well but was very knowledgeable about horses and learned how to deal in real estate as her father was interested in buying and selling pastoral properties. The family returned to Victoria in 1911.

Jessie's early schooling in Queensland had been as a boarder at the Moreton Bay Girls' High School with particular emphasis on the classics, History, English and Literature. The family were strongly Presbyterian but in 1913 Jessie became a weekly boarder at the Methodist Ladies' College, Kew for a period of three years and was made a prefect in her third year. She matriculated in 1914 and stayed on to do an Honours Course, gaining a 1st class Honours in English and 3rd Class in History.

A little uncertain of her direction after leaving school, she studied English as a single subject at Melbourne University in 1916 and commenced an Arts Course in 1918 and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts Degree with 1st Class Honours in April 1921.

The Halbert family lived in Kew just around the corner from the Vasey family, and Jessie met Marjorie Vasey when they were both students at M.L.C., and they remained life long friends. It was through her friendship with Marjorie that Jessie met George Alan Vasey who was attracted by her confidence, intelligence and strong personality. George Alan Vasey and Jessie Mary Halbert were married on 17 May 1921, a month after she graduated from University.

Both George and Jessie were forceful personalities but intelligent enough to respect each other's opinions.

