

Charles Edward Murray Puckle (1887-1915)

Researched and written by Trudi Cornish

Within two weeks from the outbreak of World War I, Geraldton was ready to begin sending volunteer recruits. The first ANZAC Contingent from Geraldton left for Perth by train on the 17 August 1914 with 28 recruits on board, including Charles (Charlie) Puckle, a farmer from the Kockatea Estate (near Tenindewa) and a member of the Mullewa Roads Board. After time at Lemnos and Egypt, on 25 April 1915, Private Puckle landed at Gallipoli with the 11th Battalion, 3rd Brigade, amongst the first Australian units to land at Anzac Cove. In July Puckle was promoted to 2nd Lieutenant in the field but following intensive fighting, was killed in action on 3 August 1915, whilst leading an attack on the Turkish trenches. The trench that was captured as a result of this operation was ever afterward known as Leane's Trench. Second Lieutenant Puckle was mentioned in dispatches for his bravery by Sir Ian Hamilton. He was 28 years old and buried at Shell Green Cemetery at Gallipoli.



Charles E. M. Puckle

Source: https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/56400761/charles_edward_murray-puckle/photo

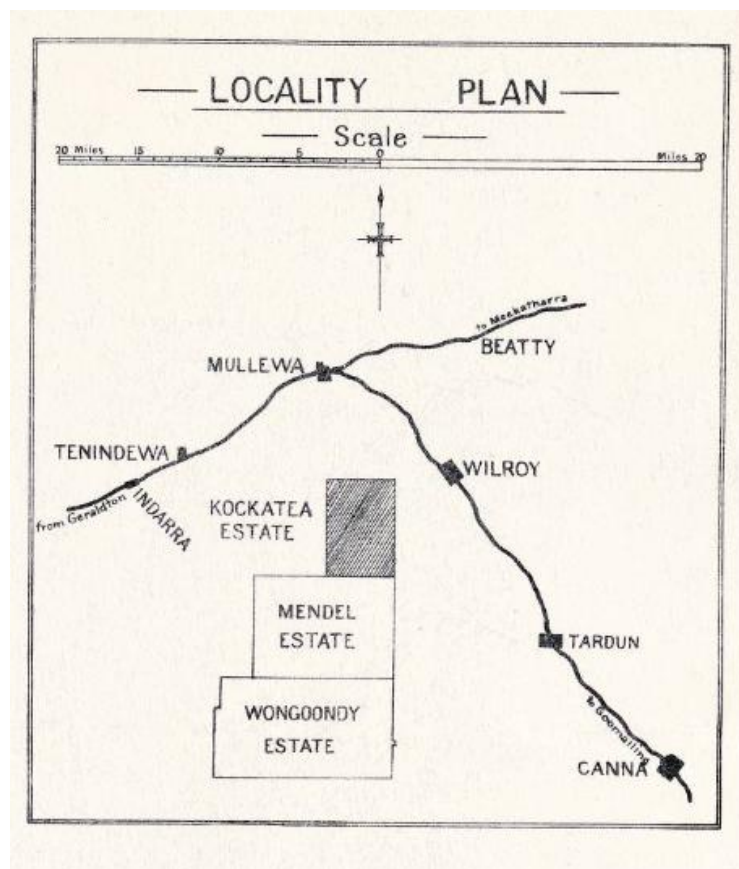
Charles Edward Murray Puckle was born on 19 February 1887 in St Kilda East, Victoria to Caroline Amelia (nee Shuter) and Charles Murray Puckle. Charles was the oldest of three siblings, followed by a brother Hugh Noel Murray, and a sister Dorothy Eveline Elizabeth. His father (Charles Senior) was a prominent businessman in Melbourne, with ancestral connections to the English gentry. Indeed, when Charles (Senior) passed away (on the 3 August 1916 - exactly one year to the day of his son's death) he

bequeathed £21,613 pounds to his widow and children (the modern equivalent of \$2.5 million). The family resided in Toorak for most of Charles's childhood years.

Charles was educated at Melbourne Grammar School, following which he attended the Hawkesbury Agricultural College in New South Wales. Gaining further farming experience, Charles moved to Drumwood Estate, Jindera, where he lived with his uncle, Mr J.H. Shuter. From there he went to Benambra Station, in the Germanton District. Charles arrived in WA in 1910 and entered into a partnership with Alister Campbell Russell at Mullewa. Alister (Dick) Russell was originally from Young in New South Wales. His father, Charles Wanley Russell, an Inspector for the Bank of Adelaide, had purchased Kockatea Station, 13 miles out from Mullewa, from Mr Hans Irvine M.H.R. in February 1910. At the commencement of their partnership, Charles was aged about 22 years and Alister was aged 20 years. Charles and Alister had studied together at Hawkesbury in 1907.

Together Charles and Alister undertook to develop their large land holding (15,000 acres) and soon established themselves as leading and progressive settlers at "Kockatea". In October 1910, the *Geraldton Express* (p.3) reported,

"Messrs Puckle and Russell have a splendid crop of Federation wheat (about 300 acres) which is about 4 1/2ft. high, and 350 acres of other wheat, about the same height".



Location of Kockatea Estate, 1923. Courtesy State Library WA
Source: https://purl.slwa.wa.gov.au/slwa_b1922447_1

As an advocate for wheat growing in dry areas, Charles shared his experiences by writing letters to the Editor of the *Geraldton Guardian*. In particular, he questioned why many had so little faith in the new farming methods that were taking place out at Mullewa and pointed to the science behind dry farming in other areas of Australia.

In February 1913, Charles became engaged to Miss Esther Temple Burges of Dongara. Esther was the only daughter of Francis Lockier Burges and resided at Irwin House. Around this time Charles was elected as Chairman of the Mullewa Branch, Farmers and Settlers Association, and also elected to the newly formed Mullewa Roads Board. Charles was an accomplished musician and also became a member of the Geraldton Club.

Following the call to arms on 4 August 1914, patriotic sentiment swept like wildfire throughout Australia as the government of the day pledged the Australian Fleet and an expeditionary force of 20,000 men to British control. Many believed that the war would be over by Christmas. In Geraldton, enlistments began in earnest. The Drill Hall on Lester Avenue was kept busy as young men from across the district anxiously applied for the Geraldton Contingent of the Australian Expeditionary Force. The entry examination was a vigorous one and many were disappointed that they failed to meet the requirements.

The first ANZAC contingent from Geraldton left for Perth on the 17 August 1914. With little time to organise a formal send-off, a combined service was organised by the Mayor, filling the Town Hall to capacity. In one of many moving speeches conducted on the night, Mayor George Kempton said:

“He felt convinced ... that the Geraldton boys would behave themselves with credit to their town... and that the older ones would show a good example to the younger ones, many who have never left home before, so that whether on the field of battle or elsewhere, they would uphold the honour of the town” (Geraldton Guardian, 18 August 1914, p.4).

After a short time training at Black Boy Hill, G Company, 11th Battalion AIF embarked at Fremantle on HMAT *Ascanius* on the 2 November 1914, bound for Alexandria, via Colombo. *Ascanius* was part of the 1st Convoy, also carrying the South Australian 10th Battalion having originally departed from Adelaide on the 20 October 1914. According to the recollections of one soldier,

“On 3 November we experienced the first bad weather – and possibly our first bout of sea-sickness – of the voyage. As the day progressed waves crashed over the deck with increasing fury. The rough seas continued overnight. On some transport ships horses were washed overboard. The following day the weather calmed somewhat and the Ascanius joined the Anzac fleet of 38 transports. Six warships, including the Japanese TMS Ibuka, escorted the fleet. The fleet headed northeast, into waters where German cruisers prowled for allied ships. During the day the men prepared with fire alarm, collision and boat drills. At night the fleet sailed with all lights out”.

Source: (<https://andrewsarchives.com/tag/hmat-ascanius/>)

Another West Australian serviceman, Thomas Steane Louch (M.C. E.D. Q.C.), joined the 11th Battalion as a private and was given Corporal stripes within days of joining. He had an exemplary career in the A.I.F. and was wounded at Gallipoli. Following his return to Australia, he then joined the 51st Battalion, and was mentioned in despatches three times, received a Military Cross and Bar and the Romanian Chevalier of the Order of the Crown. The TS Louch Memoirs are an important part of the narrative of the 1914-1918 war and these are in part documented on the WA Genealogical Society website.

In his memoirs, Louch recalls his friend Charlie Puckle from Mullewa -

On the voyage to Cairo -

"Later I got to know Charlie Puckle of G Company. He and I had similar tastes, and we became close friends. Through him we got to know several men from the 10th Battalion who joined our evening discussion group. Guy Fisher and Jose I remember, but there were others. In the end we had representatives from nearly all the public schools in Victoria, South Australia and W.A. and four or five from English schools: and there was much amusing and intelligent talk. After breakfast on 9th November we saw HMAS Sydney streaking off ahead of the convoy, to be followed by Ibuki which passed close by us belching black smoke and clearing her decks for action. Someone thought he could hear gun fire, and then at 11.30 a signal came to say that the Sydney had engaged the German cruiser Emden and put her out of action. Later we heard the story".

On 10th December 1914 he wrote:

"We arrived here on Monday night after coming from Alexandria by train. For five hours we travelled along the Nile Delta... a wonderful place... every square yard is under cultivation. The places the Arabs live in beggar description: a few mud huts without windows or chimneys, no gardens or flowers, everything is absolutely squalid. The whole time we were passing Arabs on camels, donkeys, mules, horses – anything they could ride. We arrived at Cairo at 6.30 p.m., but it was quite dark. We were given a cup of cocoa and some bread and cheese, and then we hung about outside the railway station till 9 o'clock. We then got on to tram cars and came out here – an hour's ride.

After finding our place – no easy matter in a camp of 20,000 – we got to bed by moonlight. We have no tents, and sleep out in the open, though tonight Vic Cargeeg and I have built a humpy out of three blankets and some sticks, and I am writing this in here by the light of a candle. The camp is right at the foot of the Pyramids. I haven't been up them yet, but hope to do so soon.

On Wednesday last another chap (Puckle) and I had a guide and did the Pyramids and Sphinx thoroughly. We visited the tomb in the third Pyramid, which is some 80 feet underground and you have to crawl down a narrow passage on your hands and knees. You get down inside and then you have to pay a piastre for a candle to enable you to see your way; then when you get into the tomb of King Mycron (or some such name as that) you pay another five piastres (about 1/-d.) for the guide to light some magnesium wire, so that you can see the beautiful roof. Then you pay a boy one piastre to mind your

boots which you have been obliged to discard, and finally another boy ½ piastre to pour water over your hands to wash them. We then went to the temple of the Sphinx – there is much to see.

Charlie Puckle was the cousin of some friends in England who had been kind to me when I was at school there. He and a partner had come from Melbourne and were farming at Morawa (sic – Mullewa) when war broke out. They could not both leave so they tossed up to see which one should go to the war, and Puckle won the toss. He and I took our Cairo leaves together, and in the time available we managed to visit most of the places of interest in that fascinating city. After doing our sight-seeing for the day we would retire to Shepherds Hotel and bath, write letters and dine there before returning to camp; later this hotel was put out of bounds to other ranks. At this time applications were called for candidates for commissions in the British Army, and after a lot of discussion and hesitation we sent in our names. We were interviewed by the Brigadier and presumably approved because a fortnight later we had to undergo a medical examination. Fortunately nothing came of it”.

Source: <https://11btn.wags.org.au/index.php/chronicles/ts-louch-memoirs>

It seems highly likely that Charlie appeared, along with Louch (who is identified), in the famous 11th Battalion Cheops Pyramid photograph dated January 10, 1915. However, at the time of this document being authored this positive identification has not yet occurred.

Private Puckle landed at Anzac Cove with the 11th Battalion on 25 April 1915. In the weeks following he was taken to a hospital ship with a bruised hand, which had developed a painful abscess and on the 28 May was evacuated to No. 2 General Hospital (Ghezireh) Cairo. But he returned to the Front on 11 June - three weeks earlier than regulations allowed, as he was eager to get back. On the 1 July, Puckle was promoted to 2nd Lieutenant. For a short time following, the Front was relatively quiet and the men used this time to attempt to rest and bathe. However, duties such as unloading heavy cargo from the barges kept them busy. Belford (1940, p.129) recalled at this time that several casks of cider escaped from the sunken *Triumph* and floated to the beach. These were quickly expedited by the troops who, despite the casks being immersed in salt water, declared it to be “good brew”, and had more than the customary eight, until one of the Brigade Staff smashed up the casks with an axe.

According to the 11th Battalion War Diary (Belford, 1940) on the 31 July 1915 the 11th Battalion was ordered to storm and capture a line of Turkish trenches immediately in front of the trenches known as Tasmania Post. A party of 4 officers and 200 men were detailed under Captain R.L. Leane to carry out the operation – 2nd Lieutenant Charles E.M. Puckle was placed in charge of 50 men. When the moon rose, the signal was given by Captain Leane to advance, and the four columns of men stormed out of the trenches. As they neared the objective a mine immediately in front of Lieutenant Puckle’s party exploded, burying some of the men. The remainder dashed on, with dirt and debris falling around them. On reaching the Turkish trenches, some of the Turks were able to escape via communications trenches. Over the ensuing battle, 2nd

Lieutenant Charles Puckle was killed whilst gallantly leading his men to try to cut off a party of Turks in a section of the trench.

The 11th Battalion suffered a terrible ordeal in this battle. The capture of the trench cleared the Turks from a position from which they could have impaired the attack on Lone Pine. The 11th Battalion was relieved by a company from the 12th Battalion, and this company garrisoned the captured trench, forever known as Leane's Trench.

On August 9, 1915 Charlie's family in Melbourne received a cable message announcing his return from injuries to the front as a Lieutenant. The following day, they were officially notified of his death. Initially, there was some confusion as to the actual day he was killed. However, this was finally determined to be 3 August 1915. Charles was buried at Shell Green Cemetery (Grave II. H. 6). Shell Green was originally a sloping cottonfield on the seaward side of Bolton's Ridge, on the edge of a steep slope overlooking the sea. Wooden crosses were erected on the graves of the men – later to be replaced by stone grave markers. At Shell Green rests 409 First World War soldiers, 11 of them unidentified.

On receipt of the news in Geraldton on 12 August 1915, flags across town were flown at half-mast. At the Mullewa Roads Board Meeting on Saturday 28 August,

"The Chairman expressed the view of the board and deep regret for the loss of Charles, described as a sincere Christian gentleman who had a high sense of duty, letter of condolences was moved to be sent to his family in Victoria. Motion carried by members standing, who then adjourned for half an hour out of respect for memory of the deceased".

(Geraldton Guardian, 2 September 1915, p.2.)

A sad parcel of Charlie's personal belongings from his kit bag was returned to his family in early January 1916. Then, in a further family tragedy, Charles (Senior) passed away unexpectedly on 3 August 1916, exactly 1 year to the day of their loss of Charles. Reeling from this double-loss, his mother sought to install a Resurrection window in the Toorak St. John's Anglican Church, firstly in memory of her husband. Then in 1921 she proposed a companion window, The Ascension, for her son. A new Font Cover for the Church was donated by Mrs Amelia Shuter (Charlie's Grandmother) in memory of son-in-law, Charles Murray Puckle and two grandsons, Charles E.M. Puckle and William Brian Mortimer. According to details on the Virtual War Memorial website,

"Stained glass artist, William Montgomery, regretted the need to charge more for this later window, citing the additional figures in the window and increased costs of post-war production which had been steadily escalating since 1917. The window was delayed because of changes to the images required by the vicar, the Reverend Dr. Law. In March 1922, Montgomery promised Mrs. Puckle that a start on the full-scale cartoons would be made as soon as the Registry [at the Cathedral] returned the design. The unveiling and dedication were conducted by the Reverend JS Drought, son of the previous vicar, on Sunday 8 October 1922."

On 21 November 1919, the Mullewa Roads Board unveiled an honour roll containing the names of 74 men from across the district who had served in WWI, including the 12 who died in service of their country. The Geraldton Guardian (1919, p.2) reported,

“The board, which was made by Millars Ltd is a beautiful piece of work, being massive, and of polished jarrah. The Imperial Crown, supported on either side by the Union Jack and Australian flag is painted in colours at the top.”

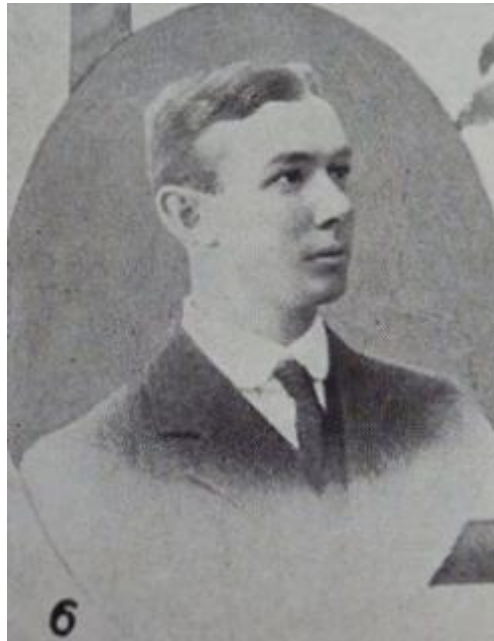
The Board still hangs proudly in the Mullewa Town Hall to this day. Both Charlie Puckle and Alister C. Russell are honoured on this board. Charlie is also commemorated at the Olive Street War Memorial in Geraldton.

Alister Russell resigned from the Mullewa Roads Board in November 1915 and went home to Victoria to enlist, aged 26 years in May 1916. He joined the 23rd Howitzer Brigade as a Gunner and embarked from Melbourne in October 1916. In September 1917, Alister was badly wounded in action in France and remained in hospital for the following year, until he finally returned home to Australia in January 1919. Tragically, Alister’s younger brother had gone down in a submarine in the vicinity of Heligoland (small group of islands off the coast of Germany), just ten days prior to the signing of the Armistice. In addition to the loss of her fiancée, Esther Burges also lost two brothers in France. Her third brother also served and was wounded on Gallipoli Peninsula in 1915, while serving with the 10th Light Horse. Esther had relocated to Melbourne in 1915 and spent the duration of the war working as a Clerk.

On Alister’s return to Australia, his engagement to Esther Temple Burges was announced. It was 11 March 1919 and both young people were now living in Melbourne. On the 6 March 1920 Alister and Esther were married at the Melbourne Church of England Grammar School Chapel. In the absence of her brother, Esther was given away by Mr T. F. Shuter (the Uncle of Charlie Puckle). In 1923 the Kockatea Estate was sold to A.C. Rowan of Wooree. However, the Russell family connection with the district continued through the Burges family of the Irwin, spending time back in Dongara and at Irwin House during the 1930s. Esther and Alister remained for the most part in the East, farming in the ACT and spending their final years in Tasmania. Esther died in 1973 aged 82 years, whilst Alister Russell passed away 25 June 1979, aged 90 years old.

The Russell’s never forgot their best friend and partner, Charlie Puckle. In March 1967 the Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. Harold Holt, announced that a commemorative medallion and badge was to be issued to surviving members of the Australian Defence Force who served on the Gallipoli Peninsula, or in direct support of the operations from close off shore, at any time during the period from the first Anzac Day in April 1915 to the date of final evacuation in January 1916. With no other close relatives of Charlie Puckle still alive, Esther applied for the Gallipoli medallion on behalf of her former fiancée. No record survives as to if she ever received this.

Trudi Cornish
Geraldton, WA, 25 April 2025



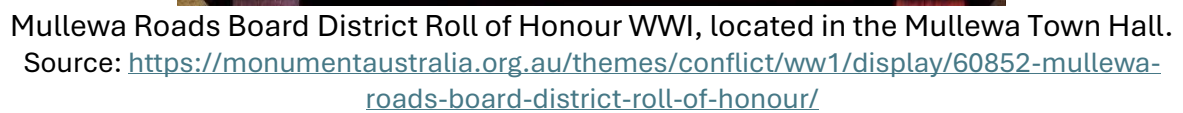
Charles E.M. Puckle

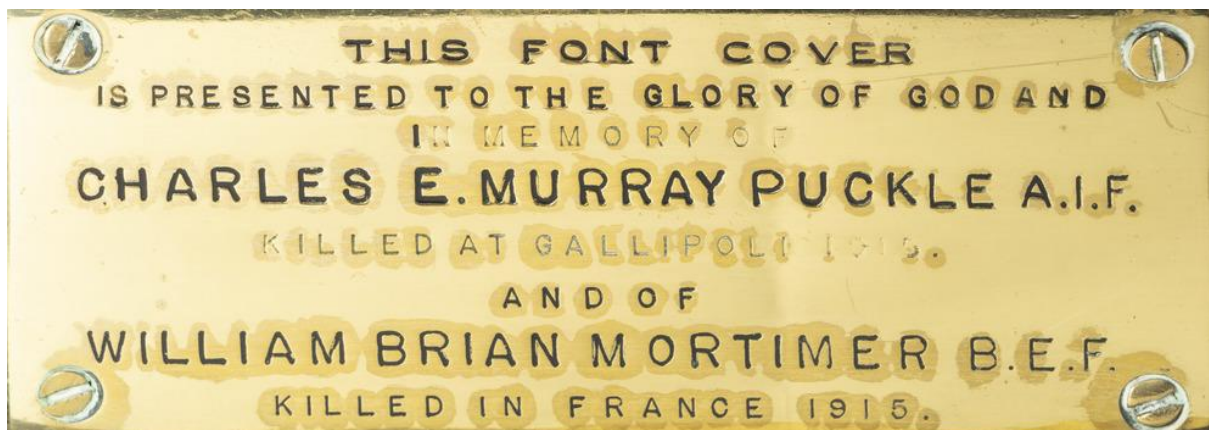
Source: https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/56400761/charles_edward_murray-puckle/photo



Charlie's grave marker at Shell Green Cemetery, Gallipoli

Source: https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/56400761/charles_edward_murray-puckle/photo





Toorak St. John's Anglican Church Memorial - The font cover was donated by Mrs Amelia Shuter in memory of son-in-law, Charles Murray Puckle (husband of Caroline Amelia Shuter) and grandsons, Charles E.M. Puckle and William Brian Mortimer.

Source: <https://vwma.org.au/explore/memorials/4058>

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