

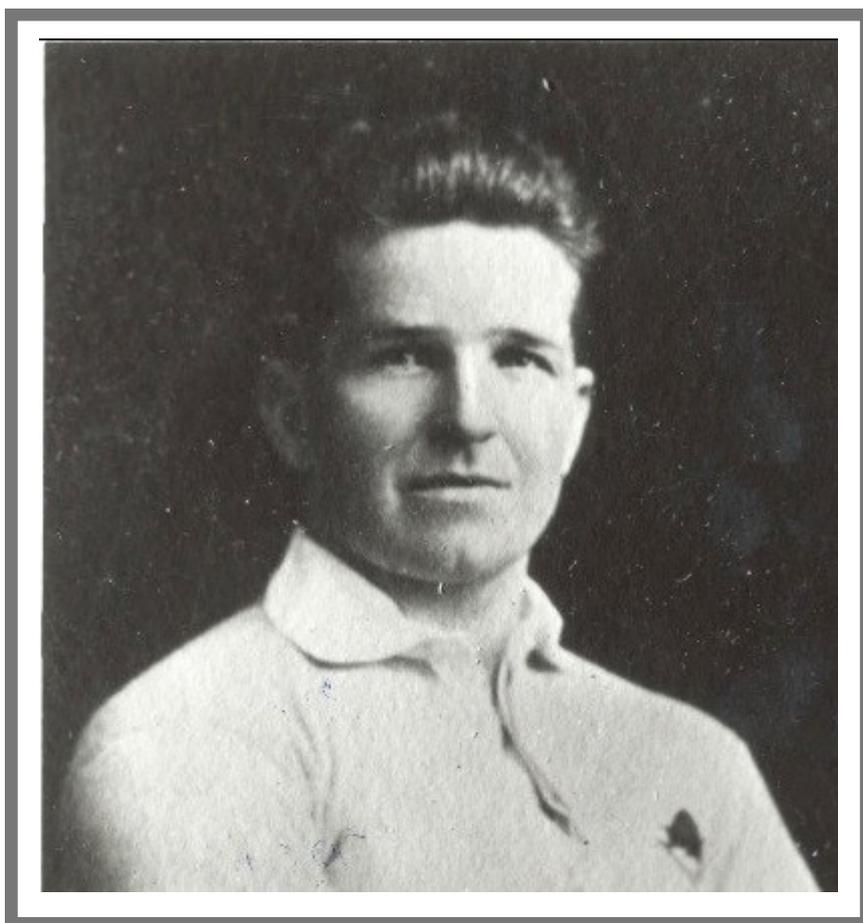
## Stories from the Honour Boards

Stories of those who served and are remembered on the Honour Boards in the Merrington Anzac Memorial Peace Chapel at Saint Andrew's Uniting Church

Booklet Number 82

# **DUNCAN FOWLES**

## **1895—1969**



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Please see a Guide if you would like a copy.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

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*Part of the 11th Field Artillery Brigade, in which Duncan served on the Western Front. Earlier he had served in the 3rd Artillery Brigade on the Gallipoli Peninsula.*

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Brisbane QLD 4000  
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## **Sergeant Duncan Fowles**

Sergeant Duncan Fowles served in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Brigades during a number of significant engagements in the First World War – the final phase of Gallipoli, the first major attack involving Australians in France (Fromelles), the battle of Bullecourt, several of the battles collectively known as Third Ypres, and the last significant victory on 4 November 1918.

After the war he played Rugby Union for Australia while studying medicine at Sydney University, and in Wallaby records is player no. 167. He then worked as a medical practitioner in Queensland throughout the rest of his life.

### **Family background and early life**

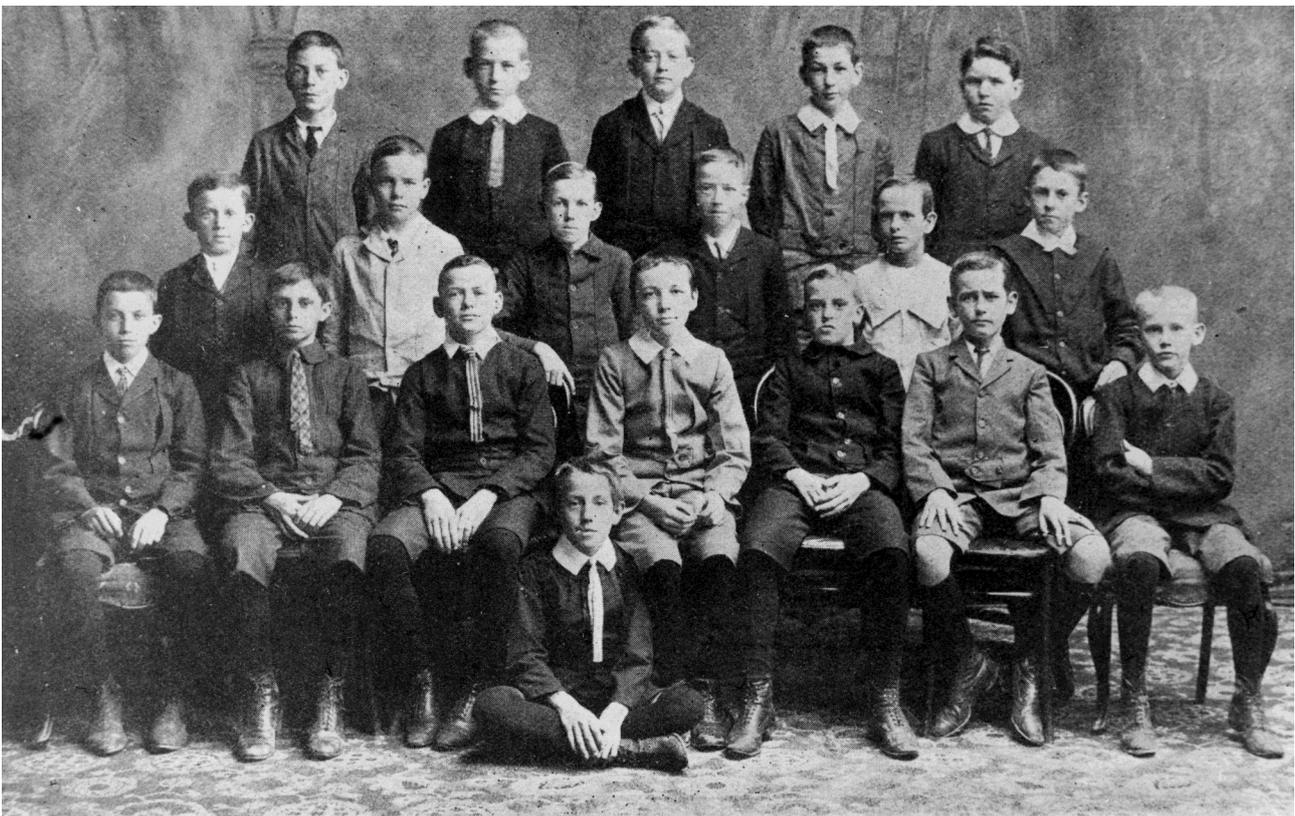
Duncan was born in Warry Street, Fortitude Valley in Brisbane on 18 July 1895, the second child of Arthur Edward and Isabella Fowles. Sydney-born Arthur Fowles moved to Queensland in 1885, and in Charters Towers in 1891 he married Glasgow-born Isabella Duncan.

As senior telegraphist in the Postmaster-General's Department, Arthur was well known in Brisbane. The family lived in Abbott Street in the suburb of New Farm, and attended Saint Andrew's Church on the corner of Ann and Creek Streets in the city.

Arthur passed away in 1927 at the age of 61. Isabella was very involved in charity activities. She was honorary treasurer or joint treasurer for several bodies – the National Council of Women, the Women's section of the Social Service League, the Junior Red Cross, the Ladies Committee for Limbless Soldiers, the Lady Mayoress' All Charities Bridge Club and the Archibald House Hostel for Girls.

The Presbyterian Women's Missionary Union and the Saint Andrew's Spring Hill Mission were also supported by Isabella Fowles. She was one of the enthusiastic helpers over the years at the Saint Andrew's Anzac Day lunches for returned service personnel, and was also very involved with war work during the Second World War until her death in 1943.

Duncan attended the Brisbane Central Boys School and in the December 1908 examinations was one of 27 boys in the State who won a Scholarship that provided free attendance at a Grammar School in Queensland. He chose the Brisbane Grammar School and studied there 1909-1912.



*Group Portrait of boys who won scholarships to study in Brisbane in 1909.*

*Back Row. RFB Philp, JK Hoge, H Kay, JH Bradbury, D Fowles.*

*Third Row. TM Moodie, JH Meek, TJ Gibney, NH Young, JG Wagner, JK Walker.*

*Second Row. AE Hansen, CF Cantrell, JV Keating, WE McKenna, CJ Hayes, RC (Unknown), (unknown) Dickinson. In front. HJ Bradfield.*

In addition to passing the junior examination and then matriculating for the faculties of science and engineering, Duncan was in the rowing first four 1912 and in the Rugby first fifteen team 1911-12 (being awarded 'Best Forward' in 1912).

In 1913 Duncan studied mathematics, chemistry, physics and science at the University of Queensland. He was also a member of the rowing club and rowed in the bow position in the eight who won the maiden eights race in the Club's first annual inter-club regatta. The cox and coach was William Brennan (also on the Saint Andrew's Honour Boards and the subject of Booklet no. 17). In that year and the following year (when he was no longer enrolled) Duncan also 'figured prominently in the University Rugby football team'.

It seems that in 1914 he worked on the 'literary staff' of the *Telegraph* newspaper in Brisbane, and when he enlisted in Brisbane on 24 May 1915 gave his occupation as 'journalist'. Friends and well-wishers presented him with 'a handsome wristwatch'.

Duncan was placed in the 10<sup>th</sup> reinforcements for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Field Artillery Brigade. He had a fair complexion, brown hair, grey eyes, weighed 158 pounds (71.7 kgs) and was 5'7" tall (170 cms). Somewhat ambitiously given his age and limited militia experience, he applied for an officer's commission, but this was unsuccessful. He embarked on the vessel *Hororata* in Melbourne on 27 September 1915.

### **War service**

Soon after arriving in the Middle East in late 1915, Duncan was despatched to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Field Artillery Brigade (FAB) on the Gallipoli Peninsula, landing there in mid-November 1915.

At that point the situation on the Peninsula was static, but the artillery on both sides was still active. Then in December under a pretext of dealing with the winter, the Allies began to move equipment and personnel off the Peninsula, with the evacuation complete by the early hours of 20 December 1915. There is nothing in the records showing exactly when Duncan left.

As a relatively fresh new person he may have been one of the small number selected to fire guns to the end to try to bluff the Turks into thinking there were still significant forces in position, but the records give no guidance on this.

Substantial expansion, reorganisation and intensive training for the Australian artillery followed in Egypt, and on 25 March 1916 Duncan was transferred to the 42<sup>nd</sup> Battery in the 11<sup>th</sup> FAB, part of the artillery within the Australian 4<sup>th</sup> Division. On 7 April he was made an acting Bombardier and promoted to that rank on 17 May 1916.

The Western Front in the second half of 1916 was a very demanding introduction to modern warfare for the Australians. In July 1916 the 4<sup>th</sup> Division artillery - including Duncan's unit - supported the attack at Fromelles, the first major attack in France in which Australian units were involved. The infantry suffered horrendously high casualties.

On 29 November Duncan reported to hospital with a leg ulcer – remarkably the only occasion on which he was in hospital during his service - and re-joined his unit on 15 December 1916.

In April 1917 the 4<sup>th</sup> Division including its artillery was one of two divisions tasked with taking the village of Bullecourt. The attack was hastily planned and mounted and was another disaster.

The experience was somewhat different in June 1917 at Messines, with a successful attack, although casualties were reasonably high. The creeping barrage produced by the artillery was accurate and the infantry was enthusiastic about its effectiveness. The Australian artillery moved to the Ypres area from mid-July, and in August Duncan was made an acting and then substantive Corporal.

The Australian artillery entered the Third Ypres campaign at the battle of Menin Road in September 1917 and was itself shelled with high explosives, shrapnel and the new mustard gas. British Field Marshall Haig was determined to maintain the offensive despite poor conditions, and the Australian artillery had to press on to Polygon Wood, then Broodseinde, and then Passchendaele.

There was no rest and the endurance of the men was extraordinary. Rain and the effect of huge barrages meant churned up ground and deep mud was everywhere, and over an extended period the men had to sleep in water-logged bivouacs or shell holes, ate poorly, lived in continually wet clothes, strained to move and position guns, endured heavy shell fire that included mustard gas even in rear areas, and struggled forward despite exhaustion and fewer men to help work the guns. One medical officer wrote that it was 'a test calculated to break down the strongest physique'. Duncan Fowles was one of those not broken.

Duncan was made a temporary Sergeant on 8 October 1917 and promoted to that rank on 8 January 1918. In late January 1918 he was posted to the Reserve Brigade Australian Artillery in Heytesbury, England – the main Australian artillery training depot. He continued as one of the trainers there until September 1918.

On 29 September 1918 Duncan re-joined the 11<sup>th</sup> FAB in France. While most of the Australian Corps was withdrawn from the line on 5 October 1918 and didn't see action again before the Armistice came into effect on 11 November, more was asked of some of the artillery units. In early November 1918 the 4<sup>th</sup> Division artillery including Duncan's unit supported the 32<sup>nd</sup> British Division in the crossing of the Sambre and Oise canal. Morale in the German army completely collapsed and they went into full retreat. It was the final significant victory of the war.

### **Post-war**

Duncan embarked on the *Leicestershire* in May 1919 and arrived back in Australia on 21 June 1919. He can't have wasted any time getting back to the Rugby field, because that year he was awarded a Queensland University Blue for Rugby, and also represented Queensland. He didn't neglect his studies and achieved credits in biology, chemistry and physics.

In March of the following year Duncan commenced medical studies at Sydney University. It has been suggested that because the Rugby Union competition in Queensland lapsed in that year (until 1928) Duncan's keenness for Rugby Union motivated his move to Sydney - no doubt an appealing story for Rugby Union diehards. However, there was not a medical school at the University of Queensland at that time, and there was still the option of playing football – the Queensland clubs and schools changed over to Rugby League, with other significant players choosing to play that game, until Rugby Union was revived in Queensland. At Sydney University Duncan resided in St Andrew's College and played hooker in the Sydney University Rugby Union team. His Rugby nickname was the not very original 'Chook'. He was selected for the Australian team and received eight 'caps' between 1921-23.

He was probably unlucky that his competition within the squad became John ('Jock') Blackwood, who came to be regarded as one of the best players of his era and was inducted into the Wallabies Hall of Fame.

In September 1924 Duncan passed his final examination and was qualified Bachelor of Medicine, Master of Surgery to practise medicine. He returned to Queensland and in late 1924 was relieving medical officer at the Mackay hospital. The following year he became a medical practitioner in Gin Gin, and also married Mella Verina Wilson in the Gympie Surface Hill Methodist Church on 9 December 1925. Mella had been born in Christchurch, New Zealand and was the daughter of Christopher Richard Wilson, a farmer, and Lucy Alice nee Thurlow. Duncan and Mella had two children – Margaret Mella and Peter Duncan.



### *Gin Gin Hospital*

*This commodious building is situated on a pleasing elevation overlooking the town. For many years it has ever had an open door to relieve suffering mankind. The equipment is quite up to date, including a private electric lighting plant. The genial medical officer, Dr D Fowles is in charge, assisted by Matron and staff of Nurses.*

In late 1929 Duncan tendered his resignation as medical officer at the Gin Gin hospital, and took up work in Bundaberg. He was a keen motorist and involved with the RACQ, as well as a sponsor and president of the Bundaberg Amateur Turf Club.

Duncan was an Honorary Captain in the Australian Army Medical Corps from 1926, and from 6 November 1939 was medical officer for Area 47 (which included Gympie, Kingaroy, Bundaberg and Maryborough). On 1 January 1942 he was posted to the 116 Australian General Hospital in Cairns with the rank of provisional Captain. The records are silent on how long he was on duty there.

In 1949 the family moved to Brisbane and lived at 489 Sandgate Road, Clayfield for nearly twenty years. Duncan died on 5 November 1969, aged 74, and his ashes were interred at the Mt Thompson Memorial Gardens with Presbyterian rites.



*Memorial, Mount Thompson Crematorium, Brisbane*

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Compiled by Ian Carnell, Brisbane, January 2016, revised August 2016



*Lest we forget*