

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 24

THE PILCHERS OF PENTLAND

ERNEST S	1891-1918
ALGERNON	1897-1954
LEON ELVIN	1895-1989
PERCIVAL G	1896-1980



Four Queensland Soldier Brothers

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Please see a Guide if you would like a copy.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

C02180

Ottoman Empire: Turkey, Chanak, Gallipoli Peninsula

Group portrait of Australian soldiers and officers. Identified is 55 Driver Ernest Sydney Pilcher, 3rd Field Ambulance Brigade, of Pentland, Qld, holding a violin made from a chocolate box. Pilcher later served with the 1st Mechanical Transport Company and died of wounds on 25 June 1918. Note the variety of headgear: most of the men are wearing slouch hats, some are wearing pith helmets, and others are sporting caps with ear covers.



*A portrait of Ernest Sydney Pilcher.
It appeared in the Queenslander Pictorial
on 10 August 1918.*

Courtesy of SLQ

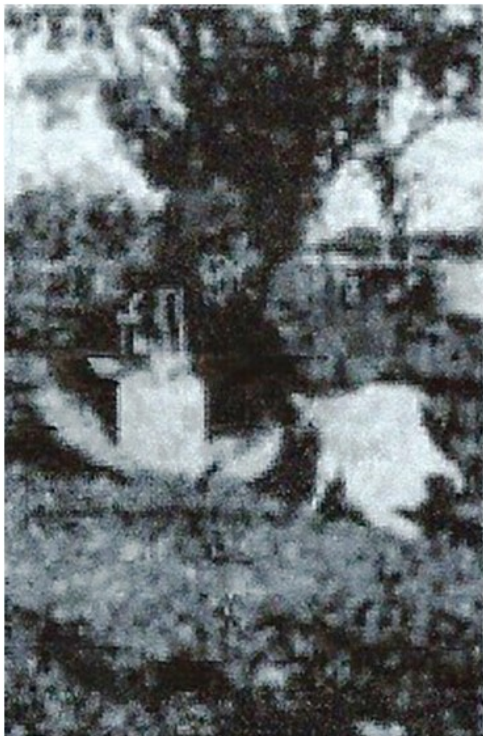
©Saint Andrew's Uniting Church, Corner Ann and Creek Streets, Brisbane. QLD. 4000
2014, 1919

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The Pilchers of Pentland

Richard and Lydia Pilcher and their two baby sons embarked from England on the sailing ship *Stirlingshire* in 1882, via the Cape of Good Hope to the port of Townsville where Richard soon owned a small business as a general blacksmith and built and invented an efficient scarifier which was exhibited in the Townsville annual show. Richard was enterprising and industrious. After establishing a successful farming business in the Ayr District, the family moved to the Deep Lead Goldfield near Cape River.

Richard and Lydia took up land six miles from Pentland and the farm they established became the foundation of the several properties which were later worked by their sons. Pentland is a town in north-western Queensland between Charters Towers and Hughenden, 240 kilometres (150 miles) from the North Queensland city of Townsville. The Cape River rises in the area.

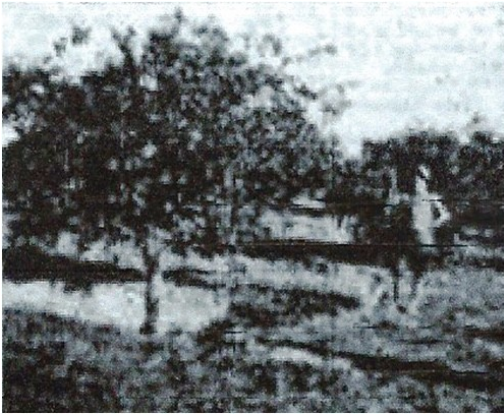


*The Daily Grind –
Butter and Butterfat Pussy*

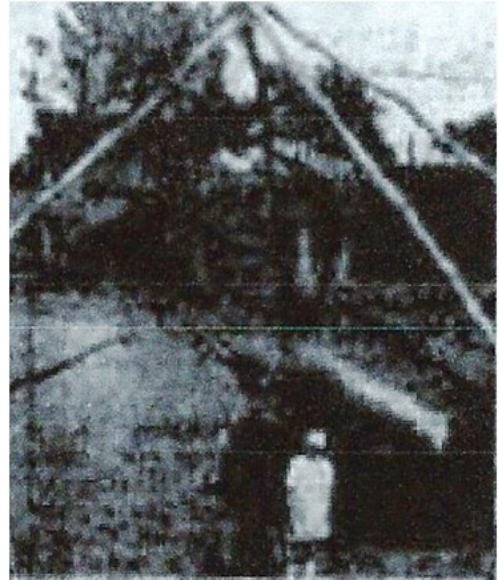


Pentland Pumpkins

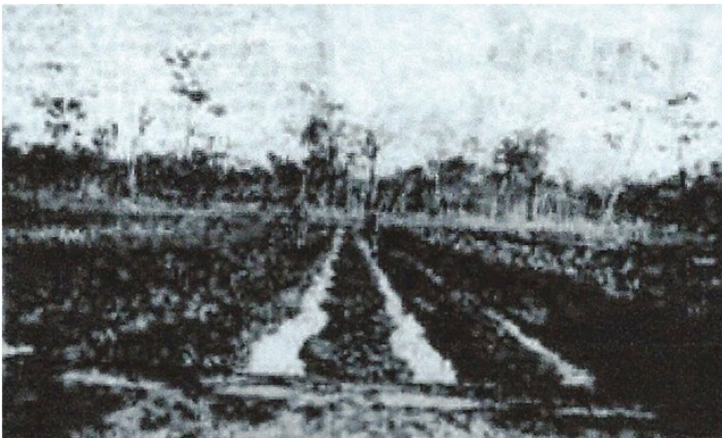
Mr and Mrs Pilcher stayed on their selection with their family till they died, Richard in 1939 and Lydia the following year. They were well known in their local community, notably hospitable, musical, involved in church and school activities. The family included seven sons and three daughters.



*Young Australian
irrigating the orchard*



*Sinking a cylinder
in bed of Cape River*



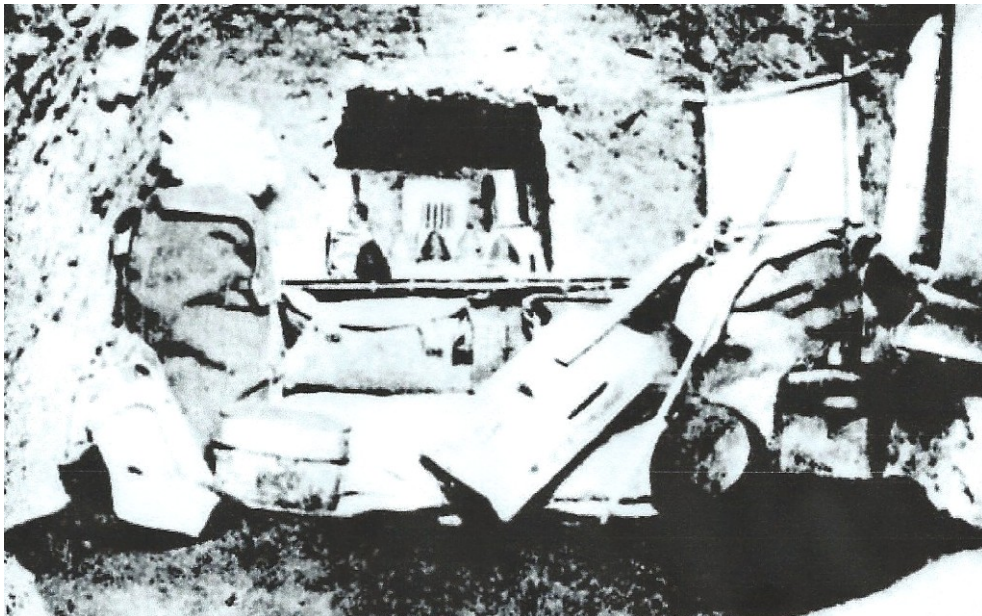
*Irrigating the market
garden vegetables*

The names of their four sons who served in the Great War appear on the honour boards in the Soldiers Memorial Hall at Pentland and Saint Andrew's Uniting Church in Brisbane. The two older brothers, Algernon and Ernest came to Brisbane as ambulance officers and were members of Saint Andrew's Presbyterian Church. They enlisted to serve in the Australian Imperial Force in 1914. Their two younger brothers, Leon and Percy enlisted in Charters Towers in January 1916 and began their training at Enoggera before embarkation later that year.

Driver Ernest Sydney Pilcher

1890 – 1918

Ernest Pilcher was 24 years and 9 months old when he enlisted for overseas service with the Australian Imperial Force on 8 September 1914, just three weeks after the outbreak of war. His home town was Pentland, North Queensland and in 1912 he was a communicant member of Saint Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Brisbane while he worked at the Ambulance Brigade in Ann Street. He was working as an ambulance bearer in Rockhampton when he enlisted. Private Pilcher, Service Number 55, joined the Army Medical Corps, having had previous knowledge of first aid and nursing. His unit, 3rd Field Ambulance A Squadron, embarked from Brisbane on board Transport A22 *Rangatira* on 25 September 1914. He was in the landing at Gallipoli where he was wounded through the left shoulder. He was sent to hospital in Egypt for about five weeks and returned to Gallipoli where he remained until the evacuation.



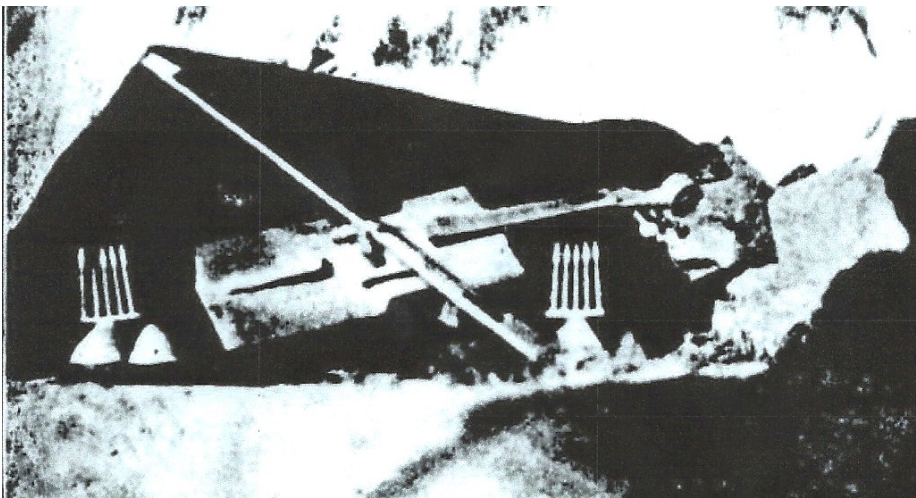
*INTERIOR OF PRIVATE E S PILCHER'S DUGOUT AT GALLIPOLI
The 'furnishings' include a violin made from a chocolate
box and a clip of Turkish rifle cartridges.*



ANZACS AND TURKISH PRESENTS

The first shell is a 9.2, the second an 18 pounder, the third a 4.7 from 'Beachy Bill', and the fourth another 9.2. The soldiers are (L to R): Pte A F Pilcher, Corporal J Burns, Pte Ernie Pilcher

Ernie went to France with the rest of the Australians where he drove an ambulance motor. He was gifted with musical ability and he was transferred into an Australian Divisional Supply Column (motor transport) where he was able to further his talent for music by joining both its band and its orchestra.



MUSIC OF THE DUGOUT

Violin made by Pte Ernest Pilcher, Third Field Ambulance, from an empty chocolate box. The instrument was safely carried away at the evacuation and was brought back to Pentland by his brother, Pte Algy Pilcher.

Driver Ernest Pilcher was severely wounded near Hazebrouk, Northern France, on 25 June 1918, causing his death soon afterwards.

Ernest's parents in Pentland received a letter from Major GR Shirlaw saying, "I feel that I must write to you on behalf of the members of this unit to express our deep sympathy with you in the death of your son, Driver E. S. Pilcher. No doubt you would like to know some of the circumstances surrounding his last few hours. The night before his death he was one of the drivers on a lorry detailed on special duty in the forward area.

"While parked up waiting for orders the enemy commenced shelling the place where they parked, forcing them to move their lorry to another and seemingly safer spot, but again the enemy located them and fired another salvo round their lorry, this time wounding your son and three other drivers who were with him.

"Your son was placed on an ambulance after having first aid treatment and taken to the advanced dressing station in the vicinity. Everything possible was done for him but I am sorry to say that he died before reaching the next dressing station. His death took place about 3 am on the 25th of June. He was badly wounded in the head and chest. He was buried that morning close to the dressing station and I am having a cross made with his name and particulars inscribed on it, and which will be placed over his grave to mark the spot where he lies.

"I cannot speak too highly of his work as a soldier. He was always ready and willing to carry out any duty which he might be called on to do and in every way he had done his duty as a son of Australia. I am afraid that anything I can say will be little compensation for your great loss, but it may be some comfort for you to know that the unit feels that it had lost one of its best members. I have forwarded all his personal belongings to the base for disposal."

As the following weeks and months went by, Ernest's parents and his brother "legatee", all in Pentland, received letters and parcels. One sealed package contained "3 pieces music, 12 photos, 2 rice bowls, Holy Bible, 3 note books, bread fork (badly damaged), Testament, match box, handkerchief."

A letter dated 12 June 1920 stated, "Your son, the late No 55 Driver E. S. Pilcher, 1st Mechanical Transport Company his remains have been exhumed and re-interred in the Le Grand Hasard Military Cemetery, one mile south south west of Hazebrouck. The work is carried out with every measure of care and reverence in the presence of a Chaplain."



LE GRAND HASARD MILITARY CEMETERY, MORBECQUE

*In Memory of
Driver ERNEST SYDNEY PILCHER
55, 1st Mechanical Transport Coy., Australian Army Service Corps
who died age 28
on 25 June 1918
Son of Richard and Lydia Pilcher, of Pentland, Townsville,
North Queensland.
Remembered with honour.*

Reports of Ernest Sydney Pilcher's war service were published in several Queensland newspapers. *The Queenslander* of 27 July 1918 said, "Pte E. S. Pilcher was well liked and respected wherever he went, and had numerous friends in both Brisbane and Rockhampton. He was known to many in both civil and military life as the maker of the 'Gallipoli violin' out of a chocolate box, with which he used to cheer up his pals in the dug-outs on Gallipoli." ES Pilcher's name appears on the Presbyterian Honour Board at Saint Andrew's Uniting Church.

His name is also on the Pentland and District 1914-1918 Honour Board in his home town in North Queensland. It is in the Pentland Soldiers Memorial Hall erected in 1926 in memory of those soldiers who paid the supreme sacrifice during World War 1.



The Soldiers Memorial Hall was officially opened on 24 April 1926 by Mrs Pilcher who received an inscribed cup from the Pentland residents as a memento of the occasion. Mrs Pilcher was the mother of four sons who had gone to the war with one son paying the supreme sacrifice while recovering from his war wounds in France.

Private Algernon Fittall Pilcher 1887 – 1954

Born near Ayr in North Queensland, Algernon Fittall Pilcher went to Pentland as an infant. The district was known as the Cape, named after the Cape River which for a short period around 1867 was mined for gold. Algy's parents, Richard Pilcher and Lydia (née Fittall) farmed a property called Eythorne.

Algy and his brothers and sisters attended Deep Lead Provisional School. As a young man he learnt carpentry and left Pentland to join the Queensland Ambulance Transport Brigade in Ann Street, Brisbane. During this time he and his brother Ernest, also an ambulance bearer, became members of Saint Andrew's Presbyterian Church. At the age of 27 years 3 months, he enlisted on 30 October 1914 in Brisbane for service abroad in the Australian Imperial Force. He was allotted service number 556 in the 2nd Light Horse Field Ambulance. Unfortunately, however, Private Algernon Pilcher was troubled with illness. Even before leaving Australia, he suffered with asthma and measles and laryngitis, spending times in hospital in both Brisbane and Sydney. Informed he was cured of these ills, he embarked with his unit from Newcastle on HMAT *Boonah* on 21 December 1914.



Ill health continued for this soldier on board the troopship and at Maadi Camp on arrival in Egypt. As asthma attacks continued, he was sent to Lemnos Island for medical treatment. By May 1915, Private Pilcher was cleared for duty on Gallipoli Peninsula where he remained till 3 September when he was again struck down with serious illness.

He was transported on the hospital ship *Gascon* to Malta for treatment firstly at St Patrick's Hospital and later at Ghain Tuffieha. Early in February 1916, he was transported per hospital ship *Lanfranc* for admission to the 1st Auxiliary Hospital Cairo. On account of continuing attacks of asthma, Algernon was sent back to Australia on *Karoola* for discharge on 13 June 1916.



Privates A F & E S Pilcher in Ernie's dugout at Gallipoli

Algernon received a warm welcome home at the Pentland school room when he was presented with a gold medal engraved, "Presented to A. F. Pilcher by the residents of Pentland as a mark of esteem." He married Rose May Michelmores later in the same year and worked his orchard, a show place in the district for quality fruit for many years. He exhibited citrus at the Northern show. Mr Pilcher represented the Charters Towers Ambulance in Pentland. When he died on 25 August 1954, Algernon was survived by his widow, four sons and one daughter.

Private Leon Elvin Edwin Pilcher

1895 – 1989

Leon enlisted for service abroad on 7 January 1916 at Charters Towers where he was a railway employee and embarked from Brisbane on HMAT *Clan McGillivray* on 7 September. On arrival in Plymouth, England in November he marched in to No 3 Training Battalion, Durrington but was twice admitted to hospital, firstly with mumps and then with laryngitis. Signaller Pilcher, 9th Infantry Battalion, AIF, proceeded overseas to France in May 1917.

He wrote an interesting letter to his parents in Pentland, mentioning a Charters Towers Red Cross parcel probably posted in October 1916. It contained nuts, a tin of cocoa, a pot of extract beef, some sweets, a tin of potted meat, a tin of cheese and some writing paper. Though the contents were very much knocked about, Leon and his brother shared them with the boys and it was a treat.

Signaller Pilcher continued, "I want to tell you of our rather impressive church parade this morning. It was a beautiful clear sunny morning, unlike anyone sees here – quite unusual, and this evidently enticed Fritz out for a morning fly for the purpose of observation. The first hint of his presence was the sound of guns and little white fluffy puffs of smoke in the sky behind our lines, showing where shrapnel shells were bursting. Let me tell you first we are some miles behind the firing lines at present, hence the church parade.

"Well, these shells continued to burst for over an hour, and the sky for a good distance was full of little fleecy smoke clouds, then the guns stopped and we surmised the enemy planes had either got back over our lines or else been brought down. But, to our surprise, just as we started the service, anti-aircraft guns quite close to us opened up, and the little white puffs of bursting shrapnel shells appeared right overhead. Then we could see the enemy plane like a little white moth with transparent wings high up in the blue sky. He was well out of range of the guns, but they continued to boom, evidently to keep him off us. We were expecting a bomb every minute, but the Fritz must have only intended observing, as he flew round and well away for a few miles; then he came back in haste. As soon as he again got over us the guns opened up, and the air became a screaming mass of shells.

“It was a grand sight, but Fritz was much too high to be harmed by our guns, and he continued on his way back home quite leisurely, and at last was lost in space and shell smoke. All this time the service went on with the shrapnel shells bursting thousands of feet above us, and as the guns roared we sang the good old hymn, ‘Onward Christian soldiers’. It was all rather impressive, and no one seemed at all excited or agitated at the danger lurking far above.”



Signallers Leon Pilcher and Percy Pilcher and Private Algy Pilcher (right)

It so happened that Leon soon afterwards was wounded in action. He recovered in France and rejoined his battalion on 19 December 1917. In March 1918, he was again withdrawn from the battlefield, this time to Southwark Military Hospital, England suffering shell gas burns. He again proceeded overseas to France on 4 October 1918 and was wounded two days later. Private Leon Pilcher returned to Australia aboard the *Ormonde* on 16 June 1919 and was discharged on 19 August 1919.

Leon Pilcher married Elizabeth Goldsworthy in York Street Methodist Church, Charters Towers on 26 January 1924, Rev Grimmett officiating. Their Pentland property was Capeville. Leon died on 12 August 1989, aged 94 years.

Private Percival George Pilcher 1896 – 1980

Percy was the youngest of the four Pilcher boys from Pentland who served in the Great War. He was only 19 years 5 months old when he enlisted at Charters Towers on 7 January 1916 – the same day as his brother Leon. Both were then railway employees. Both were assigned to the 9th Infantry Battalion, Depot Signal Company, and both embarked on the same ship, HMAT *Clan McGillivray* from Brisbane.



Percival George Pilcher

SLQ. *The Queenslander*, July 1918

They disembarked at Plymouth, England on 2 November 1916 and both were admitted to hospital with mumps. They both marched in to training on 9 November but Private Percy Pilcher again entered hospital in February 1917, this time to Fargo Military Hospital with influenza.

During a period of further training at Durrington, Private Pilcher was charged for absence without leave “from tattoo 7/4/17 till 9.30 pm on 8/4/17”. He was awarded detention in custody awaiting trial and forfeited four days’ pay. From May 1917 till February 1918, Private Percy Pilcher served as a signaller in France. After a short period in a Wireless School in England in January 1919, he returned to Australia on *Port Darwin* and was discharged on 12 June 1919.

Percival George Pilcher settled in Pentland and Charters Towers for the rest of his life. In 1921, he married Dorothy McCutcheon McMillan and they had three children. Their Pentland property was Springfern. Like his brothers, Percy displayed fruit in the Townsville and Charters Towers annual shows and he was active in the work of the District Hospital Committee. He died in 1980, aged 84 years.

*The strength of a family, like the strength of an army,
is in its loyalty to each other.*

(Mario Puzo)

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Compiled by N E Adsett, Brisbane, October 2014, revised February 2019



Lest we forget