

Stories from the Honour Boards

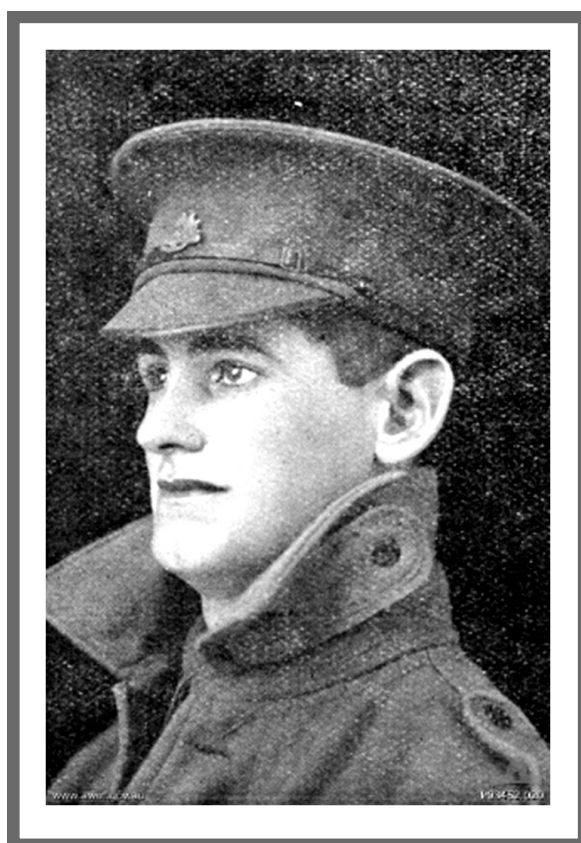
Stories of those who served and are remembered on the Honour Boards in the Merrington Anzac Memorial Peace Chapel at Saint Andrew's Uniting Church

Booklet Number 5

CHARLES ROBERTSON

WONDERLEY

1894 - 1918



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Corner Ann and Creek Streets
Brisbane QLD 4000
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Lance-Corporal Charles Robertson Wonderley MM

Charlie Wonderley was born on 5 October 1894 in Toowoomba where he spent his boyhood and attended Toowoomba Grammar School. He was in the school cadet corps and obtained outstanding results in all his subjects for the Senior Examination in 1912 - Ancient History, English, French, Latin, Greek, Algebra, Geometry, Trigonometry and Mechanics. His father was Robert George Wonderley (1865-1914), a partner in the legal firm Wonderley and Hall, Solicitors and his mother was Mrs Isabella Wonderley MBE (1871-1956) whose brother was Brigadier-General J C Robertson, CB, CMG, DSO, VD, also an old boy of Toowoomba Grammar.

Awarded a scholarship to the University of Queensland in 1913, he lived at Emmanuel College, Wickham Terrace and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts (First Class Honours) in 1916. Rev Dr Ernest Merrington, Minister at Saint Andrew's Presbyterian Church, was closely associated with the establishment of Emmanuel so knew the collegians.

Charles enlisted for service abroad on 11 March 1916 and embarked from Sydney aboard HMAT *Ayrshire* on 24 January 1917. It was reported in the *Sunday Times*, a Sydney newspaper, on 4th February 1917 that "Mrs R G Wonderley of *Caloola*, Toowoomba, accompanied by her sister, Miss Robertson, came down to Sydney to say good-bye to her son, Mr Charles Wonderley, prior to his departure for the front. They were staying at the *Cecil*, Macquarie Street."

Arriving at Southampton, England in July 1917, Private Wonderley was stationed with the 12th Training Battalion at Codford before service in Belgium where on 1 September he was appointed to the rank of Lance Corporal. He was wounded in action and admitted to hospitals in Belgium and England. On 14 October 1917 he was awarded the Military Medal for conspicuous gallantry in the field in Belgium. In February 1918, L/Corporal Wonderley rejoined his unit in the 47th Battalion in France where he was killed in action at Dernancourt a few weeks later.

In his book *Battle Scarred*,¹ Craig Deayton describes the remarkable record of the 47th Australian Infantry Battalion in the First World War. He details the calamitous experiences under heavy shell fire at Pozières, the costly and futile attacks at Mouquet Farm and the frigid winters on the Somme. He explains the battalion's misfortune to be called into some of the AIF's most costly campaigns and how chance found the 47th in the worst places within those battles. At the Battle of Dernancourt where Charles Wonderley lost his life on 5 April 1918, the 47th Battalion fought in the 4th Division's struggle to save Amiens from the great German offensive of 1918. Beside the railway line at Dernancourt the 47th Battalion found itself squarely in the path of the heaviest attack ever faced by Australians in this or any war. The battle resulted in one of the most important victories of the war for the Australians. But the 47th suffered heavy losses, so heavy that the battalion was broken up. The few survivors joined other battalions.

1. *Battle Scarred – The 47th Battalion in the First World War* by Craig Deayton

Deayton devoted 22 pages in his book to outlining the proceedings of the inquiry that followed the Battle of Dernancourt.¹ His concluding remarks pay tribute to the contribution and sacrifice of the men of the 47th. “There was probably no more important battle fought by the men of the 47th. They had not only taken the full weight of the attack on 5 April, but had fought a titanic struggle over eight days and, with the other units of the 4th Division, decisively halted the German drive on Amiens. But it was their Calvary. To the enduring misfortune of the 47th, its part in the victory at Dernancourt, won at such enormous cost, slipped into the background of Australia’s history.”²



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

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The railway line and embankment held by the 47th Battalion on the morning of 5 April 1918 where, according to Charles Bean, “the dead and wounded of the 47th lay everywhere underfoot”.³

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1. Deayton, Chapter 10, “The Inquiry”, pp 233 - 254
 2. Deayton, page 254
 3. Deayton, page 216

Charles Wonderley's body was buried in the Dernancourt Communal Cemetery Extension. His grave stone bears these words, "In memory of Lance Corporal Charles Robertson Wonderley MM 7337, 47th Bn., Australian Infantry, A.I.F. who died age 23 on 05 April 1918. Son of Isabella Wonderley, of Taylor St., Toowoomba, Queensland, and the late Robert George Wonderley. Remembered with honour".

Charles Wonderley is remembered with honour at several places in this nation. In the Old Hall at Toowoomba Grammar School, the C R Wonderley Roll of Honour donated by his mother, bears his name along with 44 other old boys who paid the supreme sacrifice. His name is to be found on the Memorial Wall at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra. Charles Robertson Wonderley M M is printed in gold lettering on the University of Queensland Roll of Honour, 1914-1919, and on tablets at Emmanuel College and Saint Andrew's Uniting Church.

Select Bibliography

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Deayton, Craig, *Battle Scarred -The 47th Battalion in the First World War*, Big Sky Publishing Pty Ltd, Newport, Australia, 2011
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The Brisbane Courier, 27 April 1891, page 7; 31 December 1912; 1 January 1925, page 14; 15 October 1932, page 19
The Queenslander, 25 August 1893
Queensland Times, 4 January 1913
Sunday Times, Sydney, 4 February 1917, page 25
The Cairns Post, 17 November 1917, page 6



**In Memory of
Lance Corporal CHARLES ROBERTSON WONDERLEY M M**

**7337, 47th Bn., Australian Infantry, A.I.F.
who died age 23
on 05 April 1918**

**Son of Isabella Wonderley, of Taylor St.,
Toowoomba, Queensland,
and the late Robert George Wonderley.**

**Remembered with honour
DERNANCOURT COMMUNAL CEMETERY EXTENSION**



This article was written by N E Adsett, April 2014 and revised June 2016



Lest we forget