The Munro Family of Burpengary

Charles Munro was born in Scotland in 1868. By 1888, he had married Scottish lass Jane Mary Stocks Sutherland and was living in London working with his father in the building trade. By 1891, Charles had joined the police force. Charles and Jane eventually had nine children, six sons – William, James, Edward, Christian, Robert and Charles - and three daughters – Violet, Mary and Jane. Daughter Violet died in 1907.

By 1911 Charles had attained the rank of Police Inspector at Scotland Yard. Baby Jane was born that same year and all the children were still living with their parents in London. Son William was a police constable and James was working as a catering clerk with the five younger children all attending school.

The family may have been considering a move to Australia for some time. William came out to Australia on the Orsova, arriving Brisbane October 1911. He was followed by James who arrived in Brisbane in 1912 at age 18. Christian 18 and Edward 17 sailed to Australia 14 October 1913 on the Indurpura and found work in Victoria.

On his arrival in Queensland, William obtained a position with the Queensland Railways. After working for the Railways for six months, he then applied to the Queensland Police Force where he was accepted as a constable in April 1912. A year later, William resigned his position with the Queensland Police and returned to England. He married Clara Melville in London in early January 1914. He then returned to Brisbane alone on the Orama leaving 30 January 1914 and arriving 16 March 1914 Brisbane.

By this time, there were rumblings of war in England. Charles Snr. retired from the police force and set out for Australia with wife Jane, younger children Robert, Mary, and young Charles, and William’s wife Clara on the Rimutaka from London to Brisbane in October 1914 arriving 28 November. The family settled on a farm at Burpengary, which Charles named Dunbeath after his home in Scotland. Before long however the war had caught up with the Munro family.

In November 1915, William was called up for duty, and served as a Lieutenant at Fraser’s Hill Camp Enoggera training recruits.

WWI Recruits marching into tented camp at Fraser Hill, Qld. 18th May 1916
[https://ehive.com/account/5051/object/396883/Photograph#prettyPhoto]
By 1917, William had transferred to the Lytton Camp, an active garrison battery during WWI and a training camp for recruits. Although William’s army career is well documented, his official war record has not been sighted, and therefore he is not on the Libraries’ database of service personnel.

James had already enlisted at the very outbreak of war in August 1914. His war service is possibly best described in the following newspaper article, published in The Brisbane Courier at the time of his death in 1917:

_The late Lieut. Munro’s military career was both interesting and romantic. He was one of the earliest volunteers to leave this State. He enlisted in August, 1914, in the field Artillery Brigade which concentrated in Melbourne, and formed part of the first contingent of the Australian Imperial Forces. While in Egypt he was transferred to divisional headquarters, and was appointed staff—sergeant. He was at the landing at Gallipoli, and served for several months in that campaign, until invalided home to England with enteric fever. On his recovery he married his nurse, Miss Clare Latham who had done so much to restore him to health, and later he returned to duty with the headquarters of his division, which by this time was in France. Towards the end of 1916 he returned to England and commenced training as an aviator. He successfully passed his examinations, and was discharged from the A.I. F. and appointed to a commission in the Royal Flying Corps in May of this year._

[The Brisbane Courier, 31 July 1917, p7]

James died as the result of an aeroplane accident in July 1917 and was buried in North Sheen Cemetery London.

In September 1915, Edward enlisted.

_Two young men Mr Edward Munro and Mr Frank Rowe from Burpengary (North Coast line) proceeded into camp on Monday. They recently came from Victoria to join ex Inspector Munro of London, who has taken up land in the Burpengary district. The young volunteers were given an enthusiastic farewell at Fernwood the residence of Mr F. Welsh, on the Saturday before they left._

[The Brisbane Courier, 22 September 1915, p4]

Edward enlisted in the Army Medical Corps, Special Reinforcements. He was awarded the Military Medal in November 1917. The citation reads as follows:

_The men [2879 C.O. POWER, 2953 A. FORREST, 13629 E.C. MUNRO, 2807 B.C. BARWICK] formed a stretcher squad carrying wounded on May 3rd North of NOREUIL during the intensity of the bombardment. While so engaged they were in the vicinity of a Trench Mortar Shell Dump near NOREUIL, when an enemy shell fell in the dump causing a fire and great explosion killing and wounding a number of men nearby. The stretcher squad with utter disregard of danger rushed to the spot and attended the wounded and carried them away in safety, in spite of an intense enemy barrage following on the explosion. They carried wounded continuously for 36 hours in spite of heavy barrages. Between the hours of 4 and 6 a.m. on that date the barrage was particularly heavy and there were no troops moving on the road at the time on account of the heavy fire. In spite of this 28 cases were carried 1 3/4 miles to a place of safety. During this time they frequently stopped to attend to wounded on the way._

[Commonwealth Gazette, No. 189, 8 November 1917]
The year after Edward’s enlistment Christian also enlisted in August 1916. He joined the 41st Battalion, 7th Reinforcement and left for Europe in February 1917. He was wounded in France in October 1917 and hospitalised in England for a short time. Christian returned to his battalion in France in December, and several months later was mortally wounded in the field on 24 April 1918, aged 20. Christian is buried in the Franvillers Communal Cemetery Extension in France. A report from the Australian Red Cross files states as follows:

I know that Pte. Chris Munro (4.B.VI) was wounded in April, near Bonnay. He was helping a S/Bearer to carry away a wounded man, and was hit by a piece of shell near the dressing station door. I was quite close, tho’ I did not see it happen. He was buried at Franvillers. I have not seen his grave but my friend told me about it.

[Private Records series known as 1DRL/0428 - Australian Red Cross files]

Charles, nearing age 50, felt impelled to enlist as well, and by the time the news of Christian’s death had reached the family, Charles was serving in the Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force, Army Medical Corps, in Rabaul.

Jane meanwhile was left to manage the farm on her own with the four younger children. The grief-stricken mother wrote a strongly impassioned letter to the War Office requesting that Edward be returned to Australia. Subsequently Edward was removed from active duty returning to Australia in September 1918.

Charles was discharged in June 1919. The remaining members of the Munro family settled back into life on the farm at Burpengary where they were active in local affairs. By 1930, Charles and Jane had decided to sell the farm and move to Brisbane with their two unmarried daughters.

BURPENGARY.

Presentation.—In the Burpengary Hall on September 6 a social was held to say farewell to Mr. and Mrs. C. Munro and family, who are leaving the district. Mr. R. J. Warren, M.L.A., Mr. J. F. Fountain, Councillor Gleeson, and Mr. P. O’Brien voiced the regret of the residents at the departure of the guests. On behalf of the residents Mrs. Munro was presented with a pair of copper jardinieres. Miss Molly and Jean Munro received a leather suitcase and a handbag, respectively, and Mr. Munro was given a smoker’s companion.

[The Brisbane Courier, 17 September 1930, p19]

Charles died in June 1947 and Jane in 1956.

EX-DETECTIVE DEAD Mr. Charles Munro, Frederick Street, Taringa, Brisbane, who died recently, was a former Detective Inspector of Scotland Yard. Born at Caithness, Scotland, 79 years ago, he left home in early manhood and joined the London police force. Most of his service was with Scotland Yard, where he helped introduce to Britain the fingerprint system. Retiring in 1914, he came to Australia and purchased a farm at Burpengary. He leaves a widow, four sons, and two daughters.

[The Courier Mail, 5 June 1947, p4]