Courtenay Puckey of Wollongong, Land Owner.

by

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Cornishman Courtenay Puckey (parents John Courtenay Puckey and Mary Ann) trained in London as a Chemist. He suffered from poor health and decided to come to Australia to see if the climate would improve his health. He arrived on the La Hogue in 1892. He resided at first in the Gosford District for approximately 2 years before arriving in Wollongong. In the mid 1890s he operated Faddy's pharmacy in Crown Street which he eventually bought to become known as Puckey's Chemist Shop. The site of his pharmacy, for those who remember, was east of McGovern's Dentist. The shop fronted onto Crown Street and backed onto the lane behind Wollongong Police Station.
On 6th March 1897 Courtenay Puckey married Grace Spence from Bega, who at the time was a teacher at Balgownie Public School. Their children were all born in Wollongong. They were Mary G in 1898, Selena in 1899 and Amelia Grace, also known as Grace Amelia, in 1901. Courtenay's brother, William, worked in the chemist shop until his untimely death in 1897 when he was only 33 years old.

On 6 April 1904 Courtenay Puckey purchased land on which he was to settle for many years which became known some 60 years later as Puckeys Estate Park.

Just a short history of how Courtenay Puckey obtained his land. Part of it was originally a 200 acre grant to Robert Anderson. Another part fell on Connor Bolan grant of 200 acres. Bolan's land came into the possession of a John Dingwall who in turn sold it to Michael Flanagan on 4 January 1875. Michael Flanagan died on 29 December 1893 without revoking his Will on which the Supreme Court granted probate on 22 February 1894. His executors, Dennis Williams of Fairy Meadow and John Richardson of Wollongong placed the property totalling 88 acres made up Connor Bolan's (79 acres) and Robert Anderson's (9 acres) up for auction on 23 October 1895. The successful purchaser was the highest bidder, Edward Collaery, who paid £880-19-9. Collaery occupied the land which was bounded by Elliott's land to the north, Townsend and Bode's to the west and Fairy Creek to the south including the junction of Fairy and Cabbage Tree Creeks which was subject to tidal waters. This rather large area was cut by the already existing railway line. Furthermore Collaery erected various dwellings on his purchase, presumably for leasing purposes.

Enter Courtenay Puckey. On 6 April 1904 Courtenay Puckey purchased part of the land from Edward Collaery for the sum of £30. The portion he first purchased was bound by the Pacific Ocean to the east and Fairy Creek to the south, bounded at its most northerly point at that time by a Honey Suckle Tree being the most south easterly point of the land owned by Captain Frank Osborne.
Before he purchased the land in Fairy Meadow Courtenay Puckey was already operating a salt works he had set up on Government land next to the rail cutting used for transporting the coal from Mt Pleasant colliery to Wollongong Harbour. How was the salt obtained from this operation? Salt water from the sea was pumped up to the top of a high frame where it was allowed to trickle down over the framework into large storage vats. This method ensured that the water reaching the vats had a higher salt content due to partial evaporation of the water. Bringing the water to boiling point caused the water to evaporate leaving pure salt in the bottom of the vats. It is alleged that the salt works were transferred to his own land after finalising the purchase.

On 29 December 1909 Courtenay Puckey purchased more land in Fairy Meadow. This time the land was part of the original Bellambi Estate, which had been transferred from Robert and John Campbell to John Brooker on 20 November 1856. John Brooker mortgaged the land on 13 April 1881 to William McKenzie, which was discharged on 20 May 1882. John Brooker then sold the land on 11 January 1884 to Daniel and Sophia Griffin. The Trustees of Sophia Griffin namely Frederick Low Griffin, Accountant of Sydney, George Herbert Griffin, Railway Inspector of Goulburn and Charles Septimus Guest, Auctioneer of Richmond, then sold the land to Courtney Puckey. This land, Lot 43, was bounded on the eastern side by the Railway and north by Elliotts Road, in fact it was a battle axe shaped block of land just next to where the boom gates of Fairy Meadow Railway Crossing was once situated presently under the overhead bridge. In all, Courtenay Puckey paid £121-0-9 for this land comprising just over 5 acres.

Grace Puckey purchased Lots 40 & 41 near Courtenay's lot 43. This land came from the Estate of Sophia Griffin. Grace paid the sum of £46-4-0.

The title deeds of the land where Courtenay lived show that there were already dwellings on the land before Puckey purchased the land. So, one must assume that when he purchased the land the family consisting of Courtenay, Grace and their three daughters must have lived in one of the dwellings. The agreement in the deed that even though Edward Collaery was the occupier of his own land "right of passage" would be shared by
both. Note that Squires Way from Elliott's Road south to Virginia Street did not exist as yet.

At the time of construction of his home **Seafield** Puckey had building materials transported by rail to then Balgownie, now Fairy Meadow, Railway Station. The bricks and timber could have been stored on their own land nearest the Railway line. As needed the material would have been transported by dray or truck to the property. The home was built in a grand federation style with a wraparound verandah encasing the house with turned vernadah posts at the front and sides. The roof continued down over the verandah and was not attached separately as most verandah roofs were; the whole of the roof was covered in tiles.

A glass panel was positioned at each side of the front door where you entered into a wide hallway which went through the centre of the house. The majestic entry from the grounds to the front door was via a number of wide concrete steps so wide that in its prime time one would have considered that these accomodated large potted plants. The formal entry at the top of the steps was a pitched roof area on the verandah which had a circular entry point on the edge of the verandah which formed the grand entry to this home.

The roof on the rear of the house was of a double pitch design with gables. It is interesting to note that the rear of the house was built on two levels there had been some excavation work to permit another floor underground. The verandah at the back was held up by larger posts which may indicate that the verandah was at one stage filled in. By looking at the entry at the rear of the house renovations or extensions seem to have been undertaken at a much later date when the rear of the verandah was enclosed. These extensions wrapped around onto the side verandah of the home. In all the Puckey family occupied a grand home overlooking the Pacific Ocean since about 1914.

Courtenay Puckey made his last will on 24 October 1942 and he passed away on 27 September 1944. Probate was granted in the Supreme Court on 15 February 1945 and the trustees, The Union Trustees Company of Australia Ltd., from then on administered his estate.
The Trustees divided the old house into flats and rented them out. It was during 1951 that a young Dutch family who had recently arrived in Australia took up residency in one of the flats. The family was Richard and Jenny Verhoeve and their 2 children. On 2 August 1951, after only six months in Australia, their small daughter Edith, aged 2 years, drowned in the lagoon. Edith's small body was found by the son of another occupant of the flats.

With the estate of Courtenay Puckey administered by his nominated Trustees, The Union Trustees Company of Australia Ltd., they, some ten years after his death, placed parts of his land on the market for sale. Amongst these was the 5 acres being Lot 43 situated near the rail line bounded on the northern side by Elliotts Road. This land was purchased by Owen Mountford Buckland a Manufacturer from Blakehurst. This happened during the time his widow, Grace, was still alive.

On 15 October 1954 the Trustees placed the Chemist shop site in Crown Street (next to McGovern Dentist) up for sale and was purchased by Nock & Kirby Pty. Ltd., for the sum of £15,000. The deeds to these premises also disclosed that Courtenay Puckey gave, devised and bequeathed his real estate to his wife Grace during her widowhood and so far as it concerns any property or properties whilst occupied by his daughter Grace (Amelia) Courtenay Walker free and therefore provided for her in his will with the consent of his wife, Grace Puckey. It was only with Grace's consent that his lands could be sold. The exact location on the deed is given as 144 feet east from the intersection of Church Street, Wollongong, and 49 ft 4 ins east of the laneway.

The two blocks in Fairy Meadow owned by Grace Puckey since 1909 were put up for sale by The Union Trustees Company of Australia Limited and were purchased on 13 December 1945 by Thomas Francis Vanston, foundry employee, of Carters Lane Fairy Meadow. The deed does not disclose the purchase price of the land.

The Government Gazette on 2 April, 1953 carried a Notice of Resumption by the City of Greater Wollongong Council of 49 acres of land. This land consisted of 9 acres of Puckey's estate and 40 acres of Collaery's.
On 24 February 1955 a deed was effected between Courtenay Puckey's Trustees, **The Union Trustee Company of Australia Limited** and the City of Greater Wollongong Council. The deed also referred that the Company was the registered proprietor of the land. The resumption was agreed for a fee of £7,000 plus the sum of £209-14-4 being interest to be paid. This document was conveyanced through Cox and Wiseman Solicitors of Wollongong, and the registration of the deed took place on 23 March 1955.

After the death of her husband, Courtenay, Grace Puckey saw the sale and resumption of his lands. Grace Puckey died on 1 August 1957 aged 93 years. They were both cremated at Woronora Crematorium and their ashes placed in one of the crematorium's rose gardens.

**Seafield** remained unoccupied and the home became derelict. It has been reported in the Illawarra Mercury that Wollongong Council anticipated that the bricks and timber could be saved from the site and stored for future use elsewhere, although from late December 1957 to early January 1958 scavengers began demolishing and removing building materials from the house. Holiday makers camping in Stuart Park were aware of the noise of hammers and saws emanating from Puckey's estate. The Illawarra Mercury visited the site to find two men on the roof pulling the beams off. When the reporter stepped into the clearing around the house the men ceased work. When the reporter approached the Health Department of Council it was reported to him that Council had resumed Puckey's land along with the remainder owned by Edward Collaery. Council Officers pointed out that the long range plans of Council would be to extend Marine Drive along the foreshore of the estate and that the proposed road would go right through the property. The proposed road would come from the sandhills at Towradgi, across Fairy Creek to join the road through Stuart Park. By the newspaper report it seems that the road would be constructed along the beach front, but one must assume that the Council's intentions have been somewhat altered as today we have Squires Way. The decision of the Council to commence demolition of the home was now essential as the building had become very unstable by the removal of some of the timbers. At the time when everyone was removing timber as well as the turned verandah post the verandah roof was still freestanding.
The Mercury carried a further story where a Warilla resident claims he offered Council a contract to demolish the house in June 1957 and salvage timbers, bricks and other materials from the old house. His offer was to either demolish the structure and sell the building materials or pay for demolition and selling rights for the house.

There was little choice left. Only a complete demolition of the house and clearing of the site. The only reminder of the Puckey family's habitation of the land today is the grand set of steps that led to the front of the house.

Today Puckeys Estate Park has been turned into a reserve. In 1991 a boardwalk was constructed through the land commencing near the Lagoon and proceeding in a northerly direction. Since May 1998 the Puckeys Bush Care Group have undertaken work every second Sunday of the month to regenerate the bushland. This has been ongoing work and Wollongong City Council have future plans to create an access track into Puckey Estate Park from Campus East.

Courtenay Puckey, Chemist, Salt Maker and owner of Seafield was one of the pioneers in the Wollongong district and has been acknowledged with his land being dedicated in his honour.