

*Historical Series No. 86*  
*Pulteney Malcolm Borthwick ('Malcolm') Murray*  
*(1860-1900).*

*Part 1 by Penny Paton*

Malcolm Murray is not a well-known name in South Australian ornithology. I first came across him when researching records for the Historical Atlas in the late 1970s, through his egg clutches in the South Australian Museum in Adelaide (SAMA), mostly from the Wirrabara and Leigh Creek districts, from the late 1800s. Then recently when writing the Historical Series on Dr Morgan, his name cropped up again from Morgan's time in the 1890s at Laura (Paton 2022).

**Family**

Pulteney Malcolm Borthwick ('Malcolm') Murray was born on 28 August 1860 at 'Reedy Creek', Talunga, presumably on a property owned by his father Alexander Borthwick Murray near Tungkillo, on the eastern scarp of the Mount Lofty Ranges about 50 km east of Adelaide. He was the third child of Alexander's marriage to his second wife, Margaret Tinline, and the third of his four sons. AB Murray was a wealthy landowner and a member of both houses of the South Australian Parliament from 1862 to 1888 (www1). In 1881 he built a large stone house, Murray House, on land he owned at Magill and, on his death, it passed to his son, George Murray. Sir George Murray, who was Chief Justice, Chancellor of the University of Adelaide and Lieutenant Governor, extended the house in 1910. The property now forms part of Uni SA's Magill Campus.

I cannot locate any information on Malcolm Murray's early life or schooling. The family moved to Magill in 1862 (Mason and Pfitzner 2020), where his two younger siblings were born in 1863 and 1867, so presumably Malcolm would have gone to school in Adelaide. His egg collection includes sets of eggs collected at Magill in 1871, 1872 and 1876 (when he was aged only 11-16) and there is one set from Third Creek, presumably near Magill, from 1875. There are also sets of eggs of the Varied Sittella and Noisy Miner collected by Murray from Tungkillo, where his father owned land, from when he was about 18 years old.

From letters written by his relatives as well as Malcolm's letters to his mother Margaret, and his sister also Margaret, whom he affectionately called Maggie, we can piece together some of his movements.

In October and November 1879 he was part of a shearing gang working on Bookpurnong Station on the River Murray, where he liked it 'well enough', although he took a dim view of the cook. Although Malcolm had shot some ducks and presented them to the cook, she kept them for herself and gave the shearers salt meat for every meal. After that no more ducks were shot. Malcolm managed two of his family's stations - Myrtle Springs Station from about 1879 to 1886 and Wirrabara Station from 1886 till his death in 1900.

Malcolm married Rebecca Vera Brown (1865-1925) at Norwood on 7 September 1888, when he was 28 and the bride was 23 years old. Their first child, Malcolm George Douglas, was born at Norwood on 4 January 1887 and the second, Roy Allan, was born at the end of 1890, but he died on 29 October 1891 aged 10 months. His death occurred in the Frome district, presumably on Wirrabara Station, where the family was then living. Tragically their first born, Malcolm, died of dysentery on 25 October 1918 in Syria at the end of the First World War (www2). He was educated at St Peters College, Adelaide, and Trinity College, Cambridge, and before enlisting lived and worked with his wife and two children on his farm in Magill, then on the outskirts of Adelaide. He is buried in the Damascus Commonwealth War Cemetery in Syria.

Their third child John Tinline Murray was born at Norwood in 1892 and their only daughter, Margaret Isobel, in 1897 at Maylands in the Norwood district. Neither John nor Margaret married, so the only direct descendants of Malcolm and Vera are through their eldest child, Malcolm. John, or Jack as he was known, also enlisted in the First World War, and served as a gunner in the Howitzer Brigade, embarking from Melbourne in November 1916. He was a good cricketer and was a member of the AIF Cricket XI that played at Lords in London and toured the UK from May to September 1919 (Figure 1 shows Jack in cricket whites, 1919). Jack played for South Australia from 1912 to 1926 and was a member of the Australian Cricket Team of 1924/25. He died at Stirling in 1974.



**Figure 1.** SA Cricket Team for 4-day match against MCC, Adelaide March 1921. John Murray is fifth from left in back row (SLSA PRG 280/1/28/342)

Malcolm's widow, Rebecca, returned to Adelaide after his death in 1900 and took up residence on Park Terrace (now Greenhill Road) Eastwood. Figure 2 shows Rebecca in about 1910 and, from her dress, she appears to be well off, and her direct gaze suggests a very assured and confident woman. She did not remarry and died at Eastwood in 1925 aged 59.

Letters can only give a narrow perspective on personalities and relationships, but I have garnered what I can from the Murray archive in the State Library of South Australia (PRG 259 Series 67), from letters written by Malcolm, his sister Margaret, brother George and one from his older brother John. After 1880 it appears that Malcolm wrote only to his sister Margaret and younger brother George, despite his mother living until 1907, suggesting perhaps a less than close relationship with her after his teen years. His relationship with his father was probably strained, given a comment in a letter from Margaret to George in December 1883: 'Papa never hints we would like to see him [Malcolm] or that he would wish to come down.'

Another letter from Margaret to George from August 1884 gives an insight into the troubled family relationships, hinting that, with John and Malcolm both home, the house was full of noise and argument. She also alludes to Malcolm's health and, while not specific, it seems that he may have suffered from a mental illness. She finds him much better, 'home every night, and much more satisfied with every one.' The same letter comments that he played the piano well and hopes to have his own one day.



**Figure 2.** Rebecca Vera Murray (née Brown) ca 1905 (SLSA B 54458)

### Malcolm's time on Myrtle Springs Station

The letters from Malcolm from his years at Myrtle Springs Station in the southern Flinders Ranges (1879-86) are mainly about visits or potential visits from family members, gifts to and from the family, and seasonal conditions. In September 1885 there was an exceptional rain event, over three and a half inches (90 mm), which washed away part of the railway line near Hergott Springs and five miles (8 km) of fencing as well as damaging the engine house.

Malcolm's earliest letter from Myrtle Springs Station was written in April 1879 and the latest was from January 1886, written at Mount Parry which is near Myrtle Springs. He seems to have been very happy at Myrtle Springs and expressed pride in the homestead and other buildings he erected as well as the homestead garden that he established. A photo from about 1890 shows a bullock wagon with wool bales leaving the Myrtle Springs woolshed (Figure 3). There are photos of Myrtle Springs in an album of 96 photos by the Reverend Robert Mitchell who opened the Smith of Dunesk mission at Beltana in 1894 and served there till 1898 (SLSA photographic collection 1610/11).

**Figure 3.**

A bullock team with wool bales leaving Myrtle Springs woolshed ca 1890 (courtesy of SLSA B 19917)



**Figure 4.**

Myrtle Springs Homestead ca 1898, with Matheson family members (courtesy SLSA B60681/51)



Figure 4 shows one such photo of members of the Matheson family on the veranda of the homestead built by Malcolm Murray.

A letter from Malcolm to his sister Maggie thanks her for the fruit she sent to the station ('fruit received in advanced state of decomposition, but apples were fine and appreciated', 15 February 1884). No doubt the fruit

was sent by rail and travelling in the heat of a South Australian summer over several days would have challenged most fruit. Malcolm's letter of 12 May 1884 asks Maggie to send things to make the house habitable; he comments that the existing house is very cold as it has no fireplace but this will be amended when he moves into the new house. A letter from



**Figure 5.** An irrigated garden, Myrtle Springs Station, 1915-20. (From an album compiled by Chrissie Ferguson who lived on a neighbouring property, North Moolooloo, courtesy Angela Dawes (granddaughter of Chrissie)).

September of the same year lets her know that he will go down to Wirrabara after shearing is finished at Myrtle Springs.

A light-hearted letter from Malcolm from December 1884 points out that both he and Maggie are still unmarried, gives her a humorous description of his ideal wife and promises her a part of his wife's dowry if she will send his description to Agnes. The tone of a letter from July 1885 is much bleaker. He is being pressured (presumably by his father) to move to Wirrabara after shearing, but "the more I look at my house the more I hate Wirrabara". He feels that he has put a lot of himself into Myrtle Springs – building the new house, planting all the trees and laying on water – and he is loath to leave this for someone else. He also asks about Agnes, but there is no further mention of her in letters and the woman he marries three years later is Rebecca.

The last letters from Malcolm from Myrtle Springs are dated from January 1886, in which he tells Maggie that it has been extremely hot and dusty and that Mr Sanders is very weak and may not survive. He also mentions an expensive bracelet that he sent Maggie for Christmas and thanks his mother for the book she sent.

In about 1916 Richard Dawes purchased Myrtle Springs Station and according to a newspaper article in 1920 when he sold the property, there was a 'fine homestead, a large well-appointed woolshed and other substantial outbuildings built by the late Mal Murray; at that time the property had a carrying capacity of 50,000 sheep and 700 cattle' (www3). Photos of the homestead and garden from 1915-1920 show an established garden and a sophisticated overhead irrigation system, possibly over a vegetable garden (Figure 5).

**To be continued**

#### References

Paton, P. 2022. Historical Series No. 81. Dr Alexander Matheson (Mat) Morgan (1867-1934). *The Birder* 264: i-iv.

#### Websites accessed

[www1: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander\\_Borthwick\\_Murray](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Borthwick_Murray) (accessed 6 July 2023)

[www2: https://vwma.org.au/explore/people/56707](https://vwma.org.au/explore/people/56707) (accessed 6 July 2023)

[www3: https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/62717109](https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/62717109) (accessed 16 July 2023)