

History of the Trust

Mabel Blackall and Charles Blackall

Mabel Blackall passed away on the 1 November 1949. Through her Will, a Trust was established in the name of her late brother, Charles Blackall, to assist impoverished journalists.

Mabel was born in Footscray in 1883, the youngest child of Thomas Blackall and Bridget Winters. Thomas and Bridget were Irish immigrants, who met and married in Melbourne in 1874. They had three children, including Mabel, Thomas Charles (who was usually called Charles), and James. James died as a young man in 1906.

Thomas Blackall died on the 23 November 1896 at the age of 50. He was a labourer, though the family did reasonably well for themselves. Initially the family owned a house on Sydney Street, Footscray, on the site of what later became the Tweddle Baby Hospital. The Blackalls later moved to 63 Adelaide Street, which was parallel to Sydney Street. When Bridget passed away on the 11 June, 1928, she left an estate valued at nearly £500, including the five room weatherboard family home in Adelaide Street.

Charles Blackall was born in Footscray in 1877 and was educated at the St. Kilda and Geelong Road state schools. He was a studious young man and took up journalism at the turn of the century. He began his career on several suburban newspapers, and then became the district correspondent of *The Age*, covering the area of Footscray, Essendon, Williamstown, South Melbourne and Port Melbourne. He was with *The Age* for 20 years.

A keen student of Australian history, he was said to spend his holidays in libraries studying history. He was a member of the Henry Lawson society and was also associated with the Labour movement. When Charles died on the 7 October 1941, he left an estate valued at £592, which included a block of land in Braybrook, a half share in a block of vacant land in Adelaide Street, and also a half share in the family home. Among his personal effects were many books, a pair of field glasses, and a telescope.

Charles is buried in the Footscray cemetery along with his parents and his younger brother. Neither Mabel nor her brothers married or had children.

Journalism in the early part of the 20th century was a tough job. Training was on-the-job and wages and working conditions were not ideal for most reporters. They often worked for a subsistence wage, 6 or 7 days a week, with no annual leave, sick leave, or overtime entitlements. Many journalists would also have been at risk of job losses when newspapers closed or faced hard times, such as during the Great Depression. Charles Blackall had a tough time as a journalist in the early part of his career. A friend of the Blackall family, James Meehan, explained that he gave Charles a job on his newspaper, *The South Melbourne Record*, during the Great Depression. He explained that Mabel Blackall was conscious of the struggles that her brother experienced during that time and wanted to try and save others from similar hardships.

While her wish to establish a home for impoverished journalists was for various reasons deemed impractical by the courts, the Charles Blackall Trust adheres to the spirit of her wishes by providing accommodation assistance for impoverished journalists or ex-journalists.