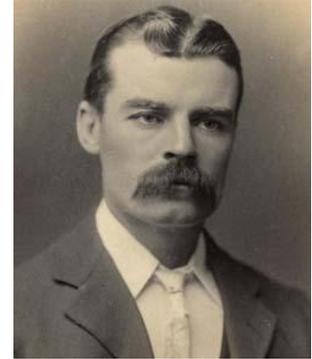


Matthew CHARLTON

Leader of the Opposition 16 May 1922 to 29 March 1928

- Matthew Charlton became the 7th Leader of the Opposition after Frank Tudor's death in office on 10 January 1922. Charlton served as Acting Leader until formally elected by the Labor Caucus on 16 May.
- Member of the Australian Labor Party 1901–48.
- Member of the House of Representatives for Hunter (NSW), 1910–28.
- Charlton resigned as Labor leader 29 March 1928 and subsequently also resigned from Parliament after failing to win power for Labor at three consecutive general elections.



As Opposition Leader

- Won significant gains for Labor at the 1922 election but was unable to form government.
- Urged the maintenance of an independent foreign policy and vigorously opposed Australian involvement in a number of British imperial situations.
- Attended a League of Nations assembly in Geneva which produced the Geneva Protocol to establish a form of international justice and promote disarmament. The scheme lapsed when the both the British and Australian governments opposed it.
- Backed the Bruce government's referendum on increased industrial powers for the Commonwealth in 1926, despite deep disagreement between the Labor Party and the trade unions on the issue.

Political life

- Worked in the mines at Lambton first as a coal trapper (a pit boy who opened and closed trap doors at tunnel entrances to ensure there was air flow around the pits) and then when older at the coal-face. Became active in union politics and was Treasurer of the Colliery Employees' Federation 1901–06.
- Elected to the NSW Legislative Assembly seat of Waratah 5 December 1903 and served in the NSW Parliament until winning his federal seat in 1910.

Personal life

- Born 15 March 1866 at Linton, VIC. Died 8 December 1948 at Lambton, NSW.
- Son of Matthew Charlton, a miner from Durham, England, and Mabel Charlton, nee Foard.
- Educated at Lambton Public School.
- Married Martha Rollings 26 June 1899.



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Life after politics

- Continued to provide support and guidance to the Labor Party after his retirement.
- Supported the New South Wales Labor Party over J.T. Lang's breakaway group (Lang Labor) in the 1930s.
- Was offered the chance to return to Parliament in 1931 and 1934, but declined.
- Served as an alderman on Lambton Council 1934–38.

Character

Matthew Charlton was a man of sterling qualities and was inspired by high ideals to the realisation of which he devoted his life. There was something about him that was selfless and generous that drew men to him. He never failed those who trusted him, nor descended to anything petty or mean. He was one of Nature's perfect gentlemen.

Norman Makin, *Federal Labor Leaders*, Union Printing, Sydney, 1961

Did you know?

- Charlton was Leader of the Opposition when Parliament moved to Canberra in 1927 and was thus the first person to hold the position at Old Parliament House.

Sources

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Further reading

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