



Colonel J. S. Lyster

[1850 – 1930]



Colonel Lyster was President of the Club in 1906 and 1908 ¹

Colonel (then Major) Lyster was a Foundation Member of the Club

John Sanderson Lyster was born on 31 August 1850 at Beaumaris, Anglesey, North Wales. He was the son of Irish-born George Fosbery Lyster [1822-1899], a civil engineer, and his wife Martha Eliza (née Sanderson) [1823-1890]. They had married in 1848 in Anglesey, Wales and had lived in the Channel Islands and Lancashire. After Martha's death, George remarried in London in 1898 to Blanche Emily Isabella (née Maude) [1855-1933] who was born and died in London.

¹ *Colonel Lyster's multiple terms of office as President are explained by the following. Under the Club's original 1892 "Rules" or "Constitution", the Presidency of the Club alternated "as of right" between the senior Army and Naval Commanders in the Colony (and later the State) of Queensland. A separate elected position of "Chairman of Committee" also existed who, as implied by its name, actively managed the Club through its volunteer Committee Members – including Honorary Secretary and Treasurer. In 1910 the Rules were amended to reflect a governance model, which has essentially existed ever since, where the elected President chaired the Club Committee.*

We thank the History Interest Group and other volunteers who have researched and prepared these Notes. The series will be progressively expanded and developed. They are intended as casual reading for the benefit of Members, who are encouraged to advise of any inaccuracies in the material.

Please do not reproduce them or distribute them outside of the Club membership.

John had one younger brother - Anthony George [1852-1920]. He was born in Wales, lived in Lancashire as a civil engineer and died in London. Anthony married Frances Lara Arabella (née Long) [1864-1932] in 1892. She was born in Wales and died in Italy. They had no children. She had previously been married to Harry De Windt [1856-1933] in 1882 and they had one daughter Margaret Maud [1883-1967].

John was educated at Guernsey, Channel Islands, where his father was engaged in building harbour works, and later tutored in England by the Wimbledon army coaches Brachenbury and Wynne. Lyster undertook the regulation course at the Royal Military College, Sandhurst. Commissioned as an ensign (by purchase) in the 71st Highland Light Infantry in 1869, he was stationed during the next eight years at Gibraltar, Malta and Inverness, Scotland; he was promoted lieutenant in 1871.

In 1877 on his return to London from a tour of military stations in Europe, Lyster met Sir Thomas McIlwraith KCMG ² who encouraged him to migrate to Queensland; he sold his commission that year.

John married Mary Anne (née Granet) [1845-1943] in London in 1878. She was born in Mauritius, and died in Moss Vale, NSW. She had previously married Alexander Dickson Burnaby [1835-1882] in 1865 and had one son, Charles Granet Burnaby [1867-1943] - born in Kent and died in Surrey, UK. – and they divorced in 1877.

John and Mary had two children:

- Frank Sanderson [1877-1930] born in Switzerland (out of wedlock) and died in Wales. An engineer by profession he had worked in Egypt in the first decades of the 20th century ³.
- Rose Clementine [1884-1903] born in Brisbane and died at Medindie, SA.

On arrival in Brisbane he had intended to establish a cheese factory, but he soon joined a survey expedition to the Gulf of Carpentaria. After returning to Brisbane in 1881 he was appointed clerk to the Legislative Assembly. He then gained employment in the Premier's Department, Queensland and rose to be Secretary of the Department.

With the development of colonial military forces, he decided in 1884 to resume permanent military service and was appointed Captain and chief staff officer with the Queensland Defence Force in 1885. He was promoted Major in 1886 and Lieutenant-Colonel in 1894. From December 1899 to January 1902 he was acting Commandant of the Queensland Defence Force and oversaw the training of troops and dispatch of contingents to the South African War.

Late in 1901 the 1st Battalion of the Australian Commonwealth Horse was formed with units from New South Wales, Queensland, and Tasmania and Lyster was appointed Commanding Officer. It was quickly deployed to Durban, South Africa, where it arrived in March 1902; the unit proceeded by rail to Klerksdorp in western Transvaal. As part of Colonel de Lisle's column its tasks were to clear the districts north of Klerksdorp and then take part in the drive to the Kimberley-Mafeking railway blockhouse line. After successful operations, the unit returned to Klerksdorp where it remained until the end of the war.

² Premier of Queensland from 1879 to 1883, again in 1888, and for a third time in 1893.

³ He had been Assistant Resident Engineer, Ministry of Public Works, Cairo – and had been decorated with the Third Class of the Imperial Ottoman Order of the Medjidieh in 1913. In 1915 he was appointed a Major in the Royal Engineers. He laid a pipeline to provide water for the army marching on Palestine, built the tower of Kantara, and a cold storage depot at Port Said.

On the transport *Drayton Grange* during its voyage to Australia influenza and measles broke out among the 2043 troops on board and 17 men died. A royal commission later found that the epidemic was aggravated by overcrowding, deficient hospital accommodation and neglect of some routine discipline.

Despite this setback Lyster was appointed Commandant of Commonwealth land forces in South Australia in 1902-03 and in Queensland from 1906 to December 1911 (he had been promoted Colonel in 1905). In 1912-14 he was appointed as Inspector of Equipment, and then retired to the Channel Islands.

Lyster played an important part in the development of the Commonwealth Military Forces. He had demonstrated an outstanding capacity to train officers, and among those senior officers of the Australian Imperial Force who received their early training from him were Generals Sir Brudenell White, C. H. Brand, T. H. Dodds and C. H. Foott.

The then Major Lyster had been at the foundation meeting of the Club in 1892. His term as President is described in the opening footnote to this biography.

Survived by his wife, Lyster died on 5 January 1930 at St Peter Port, Guernsey.

Sources included:

- Various web pages
- *United Service Club, Queensland: The First Century, 1892-1992* by Flight Lieutenant Murray Adams and Lieutenant Colonel Peter Charlton
- Club Meeting Minutes, Annual Reports, and sundry documents
- Australian Dictionary of Biography, Volume 10, (MUP), 1986
- AWM, NAA & DVA Archives