



Major B. T. COWLISHAW MC

[1888 – 1974]



Major Cowlishaw was President of the Club in 1943.

Bob Thompson Cowlishaw was born at Brighton, Sussex, England on 18 August 1888 to Frank and Frances Cowlishaw. He was the eldest of their four sons - brother to Guy, Leo, and Athol. In 1902 he began an apprenticeship on the training ship HMS *Worcester*. In 1907, he joined the SS *Star of Australia* as an apprentice (including his first visit to Australia), and then served four years on the Orient Line, gaining his Master's Certificate in 1912..

He left the sea and settled in Australia in 1912, initially with his brother Leo on a sheep station at Warren, NSW; and later with him as a bookkeeper / jackaroo on a property near Longreach until enlisting in 1915.

For a short time after the War, Bob resumed his merchant navy career with the Orient Line, but by late 1919 he was in Sydney and met Mary McRae "Molly" (née Ferguson) [1900 - 1977] - on a train to Brisbane (and at the Wallangarra quarantine camp for the "Spanish Flu" epidemic). She was moving with her family from Victoria to a property at Barcaldine. They married in Brisbane on 3 June 1921

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.

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and Mary gave birth to a son, Allan Bob [1922 – 2005], in May 1922. Bob and Mary separated in August 1926 and were later divorced, with Mary being granted custody of their son. Allan, a sheep farmer and station manager, married Geraldyn Ann Fitzgerald [b.1926] in 1948. They had three daughters – Virginia, Louise, and Susan – and lived in central Queensland, Murrurundi NSW, Darwin NT, and Narromine NSW; and by 1980 had moved to “Cluny” near Goulburn, NSW where he died.

Bob then married English-born Brisbane girl Roma Elizabeth “Betty” (née Scott) [1908 – 2000] on 17 October 1929, and they resided in Brisbane and then at the Gold Coast. Betty was 20 years younger than Bob; they met through Betty’s father, Dudley Adams Scott, who was a Brisbane Port Pilot. In 1946 Bob was appointed the Deputy Master of the Australian Company of Mariners.

Bob and Betty had two sons.

- Rodney Bob [b1933], who married Vivienne Margaret (née Riding) [1935-2019] in 1957. Rodney was a Sub-Lieutenant Diving Officer in the RAN and RANR, and a member of the Club 1955 to 1968. Vivienne was an early female dentist in Brisbane who shared a practice with her father, Vivian Riding – one of the earliest Brisbane dentists, in Queen Street. Rodney and Vivienne had 2 daughters – Liana and Sandra – but separated in 1962. Rodney married Dale Irene (née Sheard) from New Zealand in 1968 and had another daughter, Fleur; and later married Elisabeth Maxwell (née Trueman) from Yorkshire UK in 1990.
- Donald Ian “Beau” [1935-2013], who married Valda May [née Ring] [1938-2017] in 1959. Beau and Valda managed the Brisbane wholesale fashion distribution business, Cowlshaw & Son, established by Bob from his manufacturer’s agency roles in the 1930’s. Beau and Valda had 3 children – Clayton, Grant, and Kristina – who all spent most of their working lives in the family business which operated until 2020.

Bob and Betty lived at New Farm, Hamilton and Kangaroo Point, and built a holiday home called “The Manor” on the beach at Surfers Paradise in the early 1930’s. Bob and Betty later built “Hove Lodge” on Old Burleigh Road in 1955 and ran it as a guest house. They permanently retired on the Gold Coast while Betty continued to run several dress shops, living at Main Beach and later at Budds Beach.

Bob commenced his military service on 21 January 1915 when he enlisted in the Australian Army at Longreach, Queensland. He was allocated to the Royal Australian Artillery and was posted to the 5th Light Horse Regiment.

On 22 May 1915 Bombardier Cowlshaw embarked for Egypt and he joined the 5th Light Horse Regiment at ANZAC Cove on 25 September 1915.

On 2 May 1916 he was commissioned a Second Lieutenant and on 13 May he was transferred to the 56th Field Artillery Battery.

On 8 July 1916 he was transferred to the 25th Australian Artillery Brigade, 14th Field Battery in France. He was promoted to Lieutenant on 23 August 1916.

On 18 October 1917 Lieutenant Cowlshaw was awarded the Military Cross. The citation for the award stated:

“For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty, while several batteries were moving forward by night over very difficult ground a heavy bombardment of gas and high explosive shells was opened on them. The horse of one of the drivers was wounded. Taking off his box respirator so as to be able to see better, he succeeded, with two others, in rescuing the driver from under the horse. He then collapsed from the effects of the gas”.



Lieutenant Cowlshaw receiving his Military Cross.

He was also wounded in action during this period, suffering a gunshot wound to his left cheek. On 22 October 1917, due to the wound and the gas exposure, he was evacuated to hospital in England.

On 10 March 1918, he embarked for Australia and his army appointment was terminated, for medical reasons, on 13 June 1918,

Lieutenant Cowlshaw was awarded the Military Cross, 1914/15 Star, British War Medal, and the Victory Medal.

On 10 August 1918 he was transferred to the Reserve of Officers as an Honorary Captain and was appointed ADC to the Governor of Queensland, Sir Hamilton John Goold-Adams GCMG, CB. He relinquished that appointment on 1 July 1920, and he was once again transferred to the Reserve of Officers. He then gained employment as a manufacturing agent, working for some time for Eagley Mills. He appears to have had a successful business career.

On 17 October 1940 Lieutenant Cowlshaw was seconded from the Reserve of Officers and he was permitted to accept the appointment of ADC to the Governor of Queensland; Sir Leslie Orme Wilson, GCSI, GCMG, GCIE, DSO, PC (Club Patron 1933 to 1936 and elected Life Member 1936) with the temporary rank of Captain. It was during this period that he was Vice-President and President of the Club. He relinquished that appointment on 29 April 1944.

On 4 September 1939 Lieutenant Cowlshaw had an application to be considered for active service rejected because of his age. He was allocated as an Honorary Major in the Citizens' Military Forces to administrative duties, with responsibility for British army personnel and their dependents transiting or evacuating through Queensland from the South West Pacific. On 15 April 1944, he was placed on the Retired List as an Honorary Major. He then continued working with the United Kingdom Liaison Staff until 7th September 1948, with his contribution being recognized by an official letter:

"Dear Cowlshaw,

... I should like to take this opportunity of thanking you very much indeed for all the time and trouble which you have so willingly given up to watching over the welfare of the evacuee families. I know it must have been a thankless task and I am sure you will be very glad to see the last of it" (signed by Major F L Freeman, UK Liaison Staff)

For his service in World War 2 Major Cowlshaw was awarded the 1939/1945 War Medal and the Australian Service Medal. He was placed on the retired list, with the honorary rank of Major, on 30th April 1944.

Major Cowlshaw joined the Club in 1927. He was a committee member from 1939 to 1940, Vice President from 1941 to 1943, President 1943 to 1944, and Immediate Past President 1944 to 1945. He was an active member of the Committee that effected the Club's purchase and occupation of *Montpelier* in 1947. His wife Betty Cowlshaw became one of the Club's first Associate Members in 1969.

Major Cowlishaw's brother-in-law, Betty's brother Captain Don Scott, an enthusiastic Club member, recalled that Bob was always a stylish dresser; and the proud owner of a rather unique motor vehicle after the War – a large silver Dodge with silver wheel rims.



A dapper Major Cowlishaw and his motor (c. 1945)

Major Bob Thompson Cowlishaw MC died at Broadbeach Queensland on 29 December 1974.

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
- National Archives of Australia, Australian War Memorial, The National Library and Ancestry.Com
- Contribution from Mrs Liana (Lani) Roberts– daughter of Dr Vivienne Cowlishaw; and granddaughter of Club Past-President Major B.T. Cowlishaw MC. August 2020