



Captain R.B. THOMSON RD, RNR

[1881 – 1953]

Research has not revealed an image of Captain Thomson.

Commander Thomson was the Secretary of the Club in 1943, and as Captain Thomson 1944 to 1945

Robert Burn Thomson was born on 20 July 1881 at Burntisland (Fife), Scotland.

His father, David Thomson [1836-1885], was born in Edinburgh and died in Burntisland. His mother was Janet Jane (née Burn) [1846-1892] who was born and died in Edinburgh.

Robert was the youngest of their six children:

- Mary Isabella [1871-1948] Born in Ontario, Canada and by 1881 was living in Edinburgh with her aunt.
- Alexander Charles [1874-1941] Born in Edinburgh, died in Alberta, Canada. He had returned to Canada in 1890. He served in the Canadian Expeditionary Force in the First World War.
- Henry Graham [1876-1946] Born in Burntisland, died in Devon. In 1904 he was apprenticed in the Merchant Navy in Liverpool. He was a Sub-Lieutenant in the Royal Navy in 1906; and served in the First World War. He retired as a Commander. He married Lancashire-born Beatrice Novello (née Binns / Stedman) [b.1879] in Sydney in 1922.
- Elizabeth Margaret [1879-1959] Born in Edinburgh, died in Perthshire. Married James Ivone Kirkpatrick [1866-1918] in Edinburgh in 1905.

Robert was orphaned at 11 years of age and was raised by his maternal grandparents in Edinburgh.

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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In November 1898, Robert was commissioned as a Midshipman in the Merchant Marine. He was appointed a Sub-Lieutenant in the Royal Naval Reserve on 17 December 1904. His seniority as a Lieutenant is dated 29 July 1906 – and he served on HMS *Irresistible* and other ships. He made frequent visits to Sydney and Brisbane in the period 1909 – 1913 in service with the Orient Line and others. He was promoted Lieutenant Commander on 29 July 1914. During the First World War he saw active service, including periods on HMS *Excellent* (the RN Gunnery School), *Vernon* and *Acteon* (the RN Torpedo and anti-submarine devices schools).

He retired as a Commander RNR, with seniority of 31 Dec 1922.

Robert married Mary Lillian (née Dent) [1876-1950] in London in October 1915. She had married Frank Calder in Grenfell, NSW in 1896 and had been widowed in 1912. Lillian and Robert had two children:

- Janet Dent [1917-2019] Born in Portsmouth, UK, and died unmarried in Sydney.
- David Arnold [1917-1945] Born in Portsmouth, UK. He enlisted in the British Army in the Second World War and was posted to the SOE (Special Operations Executive) as a Lieutenant. He was taken prisoner by the Japanese and died in Indonesia on 29 April 1945. He is buried in the Jakarta War Cemetery.

The family moved to Australia in the late 1920s and lived at Turramurra in Sydney, where Robert's occupation was listed a Master Mariner.

With the outbreak of the Second World War in August 1939, Robert was immediately appointed as a Commander in the RANR for temporary service. His first appointment was to HMAS *Penguin* in Sydney in an NCS (Naval Control of Shipping) role. He was then appointed to Brisbane in NCS and Sea Transport Officer roles. In March 1941 he returned to Sydney at HMAS *Rushcutter* – and then returned to Brisbane as OiC NCS. His temporary service completed in December 1942 (having exceeded the age of 60); and in July 1943 he was appointed as a Captain (Retired) RNR.

Robert had joined the Club when he was posted to Brisbane in 1939; and joined the Committee in 1941-42 while still serving. On his retirement from the Navy in 1943, the position of the first full time Secretary was offered to the well-liked Commander Thomson by the Committee.

Towards the end of 1945, Captain Thomson retired - he had the misfortune, before that time, to receive advice that his son Lieutenant D A Thomson had died while a prisoner of war. The Committee appointed as his successor a man of outstanding calibre, Lieutenant Commander E A Feldt, whose war time exploits had made him well known.

Captain Thomson died on 18 August 1953 at Turramurra, NSW.

During his tenure, Captain Thomson served Presidents Cowlshaw, Dowling and Little

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
- UK National Archives
- NAA
- CWGC