



Major General H. GUNTER

[1844 – 1902]



Major General Gunter was President of the Club in 1896 and 1898 ¹

Howel Gunter was born on 9 May 1844 at Fulham, Middlesex, England

He was the son of John Gunter [1790-1856], born in Wales and died at Fulham, whose occupation was described as “gentleman”. His mother was Lucy Jane (née Picard) [1795-1869] She was born and died in Somerset.

¹ Colonel Gunter’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.

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Howel was the youngest of their six children, all born in Fulham, London:

- John [1836-1897] Died in Harburg, Germany. He had married Anna (née Haupt); they had two sons and two daughters.
- Lucy Anne [1837-1853]
- William [1838-1901] Married Elizabeth (née Rockett) [b.1847] and had seven children; and subsequently married Caroline Conran (née Chadwick) and had three children.
- Blanche [1839-1886] Died in Ceylon. Married Lovell Burchett Clarence [1838-1917] a barrister and colonial judge. They had five children.
- Edward [1841-1918] Died in Bristol.

On 2 February 1871, at Christ Church Cathedral, Colombo, Howel married a widow, Mary Alice Sinclair MacLagan (née Wall) [1845-1927] She was born in Manchester and died in Hampshire.

They had five sons, some of whom were educated on the Isle of Man.

- Arthur Howel [1872-1873] Born and died Cawnpore, India.
- Clarence Preston [1873-1965]² Born India and died in Devon. In London in 1919 He married Panise ("Pansy") Effie May (née Somerville) [1885-1957] – the New York born daughter of the Countess d'Epineuil. They had two daughters. He lived and worked in India for most of his life.
- Oswald Geoffrey [1876-1955] Born in Bengal, died in Hampshire. Married Florence Bland (née Hilder) [1888-1971] in 1909. A Cambridge educated engineer.
- Athelstane Claude [1881-1968]³ Born in Devon, died in Essex. Married Dorothy Brenda Essington (née Boulton) [1890-1946] in London in 1921. Soldier and fruit farmer.
- Rolf Rostron [1888-1954]⁴ Born on the Isle of Man, died Saskatoon, Canada.

Howel was commissioned from the Royal Military College, Sandhurst, into the 73rd (Perthshire) Regiment of Foot on 8 July 1862 as an Ensign, without purchase, and on 23 June 1865 purchased promotion to Lieutenant. After service in China in 1866-68 the regiment was transferred to the Straits Settlements (Penang / Malacca / Singapore) in December 1868 and to Ceylon in March 1869. Gunter served as adjutant in 1866-67 and 1870-74.

After six months home leave in 1873 Gunter returned to India and on 7 July 1874 was promoted Captain, without purchase. He qualified at the Garrison School of Instruction, Umballa, in 1876, with distinguished results in fortifications, military law and tactics and became a specialist in these fields, lecturing as assistant garrison instructor at Sialkot in 1876-78 and garrison instructor at Agra in 1878-85.

After the Cardwell reforms the 73rd Regiment had become the 2nd Battalion, Royal Highlanders (The Black Watch). Gunter was promoted Major in this unit on 10 July 1881, remained in India until 1885

² Colonel C.P. Gunter CIE, OBE, RE 1914-18 served in Mesopotamia – Deputy Director of Survey, OBE and twice Mentioned in Despatches. 1926-28 Surveyor General of India and Director, Survey of India.

³ Major A.C. Gunter DSO, RA 1900-26,

⁴ Lieutenant R. R. Gunter Royal Garrison Artillery; Commissioned RMA 1907, Malta 1911; Captain Canadian Field Artillery, Canadian Expeditionary Force 1914-18

and served in England for the following six years. Although appointed to command the Black Watch in January 1891 with the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel, he exchanged to command the Norfolk Regiment in November 1890. He landed in Burma with the Norfolks in December 1891, took the regiment to India in 1893 and relinquished command on 19 August 1894; he then went on half-pay in the British Army.

Gunter was rescued from the limbo of half-pay by the Queensland government. Since its inception in 1859 the colony had maintained local volunteer and militia forces (Queensland Defence Force) commanded by local officers until 1884. Then imperial officers were appointed as Commandant. Gunter became Commandant in April 1895 with the local rank of Major General.

At least one contemporary source suggests that he was not quite the success his predecessors had been. In *A Journalist's Memories* (Brisbane, 1927), Major General R. Spencer Browne alleges that he 'did not quite catch the Australian spirit' and that the Queensland government accepted him on the misunderstanding that it was getting a 'writer on Tactics of the same surname and didn't discover the mistake until it was too late to remedy it'. Spencer Browne acknowledged that the story was 'rather apocryphal'. Gunter was an expert in fortifications and, since a large proportion of Queensland's defence vote in the 1890s went towards the maintenance of a garrison on Thursday Island, it is reasonable to assume that he was appointed because of his qualifications.

Gunter had a comparatively tranquil tour of command, being largely occupied with intercolonial conferences concerning the amalgamation of the colonies' forces in a Commonwealth army. In July 1899, on Gunter's recommendation, Queensland was the first colony to offer troops for service in South Africa. In September of that year, he attended a meeting of Australian Commandants in Melbourne to organize an Australian contingent.

He left for England on leave in December 1899 and was placed on the unattached list, British Army, in April 1900. He was Colonel commanding the 63rd Regimental District, Ashton-under-Lyne, when a *Times* obituary paid tribute to his work in Queensland. He had done 'good service in the practical training in camp of the colonial troops. He was a strong advocate of thorough company training, and the good service done by the Queensland contingent in the late war in South Africa bore testimony to his efforts'. He was also 'much esteemed for his amiable disposition'.

Colonel Howel Gunter was Club President for two years (1896 and 1898) while Commandant of the Queensland Defence Force.

Colonel Howel Gunter died on 2 August 1902 of died of cardiac disease at Kensington, London.

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 9, (MUP), 1983
- Trove