



Lieutenant Colonel Thomas PYE

[1862 – 1930]



Colonel Pye was elected to Life Membership of the Club – possibly after 1919 and before 1928.

Colonel Pye was President of the Club in 1919

Thomas Pye was born in Ormskirk, Lancashire on 15 June 1862.

His father was Edward Pye [1830-1880] a farmer; and his mother was Ellen (née Hewitt) [1833-1881]

He was the fifth of their six children – with four elder sisters and a younger brother.

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Thomas trained as an architect in England and emigrated to Sydney in January 1883 on the ship "John Elder."

In Sydney in 1883, Thomas married Emily Ruth (née Ivy). She was born in 1857 in Manchester and died in 1928 in Harrogate, Yorkshire. She had emigrated to Sydney in 1883. Thomas' sister Ann Jane Pye was a witness at their wedding, and in 1900 his younger brother John Hewitt Pye was married in Sydney – indicating that other family members had moved to Australia.

Before her death, the Census of 1881 shows Thomas' widowed mother Ellen keeping a lodging house in Omskirk. In the same Census, Emily Ivy's widowed mother also kept a lodging house in a nearby street. It is almost certain the Thomas and Emily not only knew each other, but both migrated to Sydney at about the same time and were married shortly thereafter. Was it an elopement?

Emily appears to have been living in London in 1916 and may not have returned to Australia – her address being c/- Agent-General for Queensland, London.

They had four children. Ivy Pye evidently returned to her mother in England from Brisbane for their first-born – Alma Norman. In a similar manner Hermione and Juanita was born in Sydney.

- Alma Norman [1885-1964] Born in Lancashire, died in Sydney. A mining engineer and analytical chemist who lived variously in Charters Towers, Sydney, and Newcastle. Married with two children,
- Hermione Estelle [1888-1969] Born in Sydney, died in Melbourne. Trained as a teacher. Married Charles Patrick Lennon [1883-1919], an insurance inspector, in Brisbane, and had two daughters. In 1923 she subsequently married Sydney George Gill [1887-1958]¹, a storekeeper in Brisbane. They later separated and she lived in England with her daughter for many years before returning to Australia.
- Juanita Lenore [1891-1965] Born in Sydney and died in Hove, Sussex. Did not marry and lived in England from 1932. She was one of Queensland's first female architects. In her early career she worked at the Works Department during World War 1
- Eric Blundell [1895-1977]² Born in Brisbane and died in Shrewsbury, England. Commercial Traveller. He lived in England post-war. In 1932 he married Ellen (née Moore) [1890-1975] They had no children.

Pye had worked as an architect in Sydney under engagement to J. J. Clark – a renowned architect working on major government and private commissions in Melbourne, Sydney, and Brisbane. In 1884, Pye moved to Brisbane and joined the Queensland Public Works Department to take charge of the documentation of Clark's design for the Brisbane Public Offices (Treasury Building). After completion of the plans for the first stage of the Public Offices, Pye resigned from his public post at the end of May 1885.

In 1885, Pye entered partnership with J.J. Clark's brother George, having previously prepared the drawings for Clark's Bros' Brisbane Masonic Hall while employed in the offices of J.J. Clark. He was involved in a number of projects while at the firm, most notably the Imperial Hotel in Brisbane. Clark and Pye ended their partnership in early May 1886.

¹ 3145 Private S.G. Gill 52nd Battalion AIF 1916-19, France. Sergeant, 1 MD Records Office, 1942-43

² Gunner E.B. Pye Private 7th Infantry Battalion (Militia) 1913-16. 3rd Division Field Artillery 1916-18, gassed and wounded, France.

In June 1886 Pye rejoined the Works Department to prepare drawings for the Public Offices. Pye is associated with the preparation of the plans for the first and second sections of the Public Offices – those facing William Street and the Queen’s Gardens respectively. This was only a temporary appointment until he was appointed as a permanent draftsman in December 1889. In 1890, the drawings for the Public Offices were completed.

In 1892, A.B. Brady, the Engineer for Bridges, took charge of buildings as the Government Architect, and Pye was appointed Chief Draftsman. In 1898, Pye was appointed First Assistant Architect. In February 1902, Pye became District Architect, Southern Division with responsibility for Government buildings south of Gympie. His equivalent for the Northern Division was John Smith Murdoch. In 1904, Murdoch transferred to the Commonwealth. Consequently, Pye assumed responsibility for the whole of Queensland. In September 1906, Pye was appointed deputy Government Architect and Acting Under Secretary and continued in that office until his retirement in August 1921. He served over 33 years with the Department of Public Works.

Responsibility for individual projects during his employment at the Public Works Department is difficult to discern. The Lands and Survey Offices (Land Administration Building) are considered Pye’s masterpiece. The significant stylistic and technical innovations used in the design of the Lands Offices such as the use of concrete and the Edwardian Baroque style make them almost a decade ahead of comparable Australian buildings. Pye personally supervised the details, including the statuary.

Major buildings of his design included:

- Warwick Post Office
- DPI building (99 William Street)
- Customs House Rockhampton
- Ipswich Post Office
- Naval Offices
- Land Administration Building (142 George Street)
- School of Musketry and Small Arms Magazine, Enoggera Barracks
- Toowoomba Technical College
- Cairns Court House
- Many public schools throughout the State



Treasury Building [George, William, Adelaide, and Queen Streets]



Lands Administration Building [Elizabeth, William, and George Streets]



Customs House [Quay Street, Rockhampton]

After leaving the Works Department, Pye practiced privately in Brisbane. An amateur artist, he was a member of the Queensland Authors' and Artists' Association and was a collector for the Queensland Museum.

Pye was commissioned in the Australian Army in 1906 (at age 44) and served in the Australian Engineers. Lieutenant Colonel Pye was a military censor in Queensland for about five months in 1914 and in September 1915. He took a keen interest in rifle shooting and was a prominent member of local rifle clubs.

He joined the AIF Sea Transport Service in September 1915 as a Lieutenant Colonel – as OC troops on troop and hospital ships travelling between Australia and Europe. His deployments included:

- September 1915 – December 1915
Brisbane to Suez on HMAT *Armada* (A26), return to Australia on HMAT *Borda* (A30)

- April 1916 - June 1916
Brisbane to Sydney to UK and return to Australia on RMS *Mooltan*.

It is not known when Pye joined the Club – 1906 is the likely year. The Life Member Honour Board records him as a founding 1892 member – however this would appear unlikely as he was not commissioned, and thus eligible for membership, until 1906. He served on the Committee in 1908-09, 1909-10 and probably in succeeding years. He served as its President in 1919.

The Club History records that in 1910 Captain Pye presented a lecture on “Field fortifications and entrenchments”. As Lieutenant Colonel Pye, in 1919 he designed the Clubs First World War Honour Board which is displayed in the Club foyer.

He was elected to Life Membership - likely to have been after 1919 and before 1928.

Following the death of his wife, Pye left Brisbane In May 1929 to travel overseas.

Colonel Pye died in 1930 after catching black-water fever at the Victoria Falls, Northern Rhodesia.

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 and War Memorial archives