



Major General Reginald Spencer BROWNE CB, VD

[1856 – 1944]



General (then Captain) Browne was a Foundation member of the Club.

General Browne was a Trustee of the Club in 1914

General Browne was elected to Life Membership of the Club in 1934.

Reginald Spencer Browne (1856-1943), journalist and soldier, was born at Oaklands, Appin, New South Wales, on 13 July 1856, son of William James Merrick Shawe Browne, pastoralist, and his wife Rachel, née Broad. His father, a native-born scion of an already old Australian family, was superintending officer of Yeomanry and Volunteer Corps in 1854.

Educated at Appin, at Corowa and in England, Browne became a journalist and precociously published slim volumes of verse in 1874-75 from the offices of the Deniliquin *Pastoral Times* and the *Albury Banner*. He was a sub-editor on the *Townsville Herald* in 1877 and editor of the *Cooktown Herald* in 1878. When Sir Thomas McIlwraith arranged a cabinet syndicate to control the *Observer* in 1881, Browne moved to Brisbane as its editor and married Violet Edith Fanny Sutton of Maryborough on 13 October. She died soon afterwards.

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Browne joined the *Brisbane Courier* in 1882 and stayed there for nearly all his working life. As associate editor of the *Queenslander*, he discovered and encouraged the poet George Essex Evans. Commissioned in the Queensland Mounted Infantry on 20 December 1887, he was said to have found work briefly on the London press to facilitate military study. He published *Romances of the Goldfield and Bush*, a volume of slight prose sketches, in London in 1890. Also published were *Shadow and Shine* and a book of verse *The Last Ride*.

Browne commanded a flying column of his regiment in western Queensland during the shearers' strike of 1891 but was, nevertheless, always sympathetic to trade-unionism. He was promoted Captain in 1891 and Major in 1896. In November 1899 he sailed for South Africa as a special-service officer with the first Queensland contingent, carrying the local rank of Major. He served with the Queensland Mounted Infantry, and was a staff officer with the 3rd Mounted Infantry Corps and Deputy Assistant Adjutant General. With active service in many fields, he was appointed C.B., received the Queen's Medal with five clasps, and was twice mentioned in Despatches. He was invalided to Australia in November 1900. His return to Brisbane was a triumph.

Browne progressed slowly through the literary hierarchy of the *Courier* but devoted much time still to soldiering as Lieutenant Colonel commanding the 13th Light Horse Regiment from 1903 and Colonel of the 5th Light Horse Brigade from 1906. In 1911 he was transferred to the Reserve of Officers. In 1905 he was awarded the Colonial Auxiliary Forces Long Service Medal. He was disappointed in his aspirations in 1906 to become Lieutenant Governor of Papua and in 1908 acting State Commandant.

He presided at a meeting on 20 January 1911 when one faction among Brisbane journalists forestalled another connected with the Trades Hall, and formed an association. As first president he steered it through complications caused by the general strike of 1912 but was never again active, though he urged young men to support the association and he later contributed to its funds while overseas. As an old friend and political adherent of (Sir) Littleton Groom, he transmitted regular political intelligence and worked informally for the Liberal Party.

On 28 August 1915, Browne was appointed officer commanding Australian Details Egypt, responsible for training reinforcements. In September Major General Legge sent for him to replace the commander of the 6th Infantry Brigade who had drowned following the torpedoing of the troop transport *Southland*. Browne took over the brigade on 8 September 1915 and served at Lone Pine and Quinn's Post, but at the age of 59 the rigours of the campaign combined with his age began to take its toll. Nonetheless he stayed until he was evacuated on 10 December 1915.

On his return to Egypt, Browne was transferred to the Training and General Base Depot at Tel el Kebir. He was promoted to temporary Brigadier General on 16 March 1916 and appointed to command the Depot on 20 March 1916. Publication by him in 1915 of *The Heroic Serbians* won him the order of the Serbian Red Cross.

In 1916 in England he commanded the Australian Training Depot on Salisbury Plain, then moved to No.2 Command Depot at Weymouth where he probably met the novelist Thomas Hardy. This unit was responsible for taking in men "unfit for service within six months" and therefore to be returned home.

He returned to Australia, medically unfit, in November 1917, commanded the Molonglo Concentration Camp at Canberra from February to December 1918, was then demobilized, and was formally retired on 20 October 1921 as honorary Major General. For two years he was State president of the Returned Soldiers' and Sailors' Imperial League of Australia.

Between 1925 and 1927 Browne contributed a weekly article to the *Courier*, giving his memories of men and events in the Queensland of his time. These were published as *A Journalist's Memories* (1927); the book is still the source of much of both the history and legend of Queensland. In his later years Browne was a famous Brisbane identity. He was nominally financial editor of the *Courier Mail*, reporting only the limited operations of the Brisbane Stock Exchange; he also edited the *Queensland Trustees Review*.

On 7 August 1889 he had married Catherine Fraser Munro (d.1942), a noted musician and amateur actress. He had been interested primarily in pastimes like polo, shooting and fishing, but henceforth shared wide cultural interests with his wife. He died, childless, on 9 November 1943, and was cremated with Anglican rites. His estate was sworn for probate at £1912. Tolerant and broadminded, Browne had been widely respected as 'in every sense a gentleman'.

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 7, (MUP), 1979 H.J. Summers