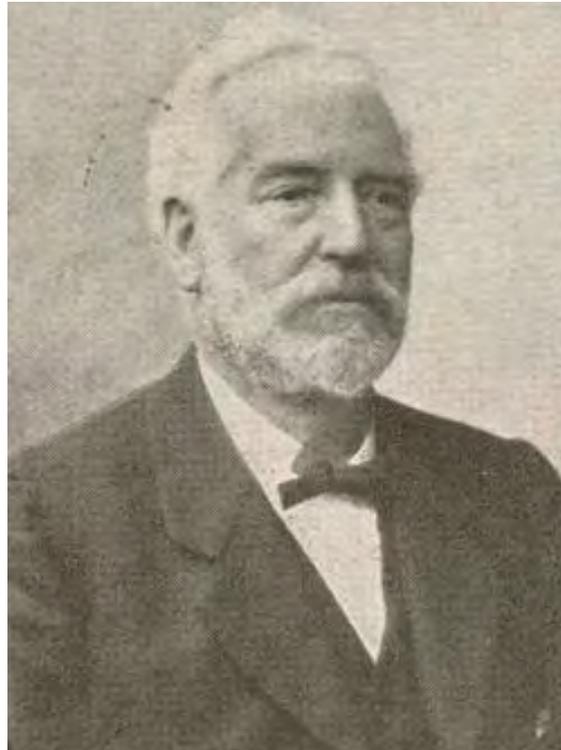




**Lieutenant J. W. WASSELL VD**

**[1841-1926]**



**Lieutenant Wassell is believed to have been a Founding Member of the Club.**

**Lieutenant Wassell was elected to Life Membership of the Club – possibly between 1910 and 1926**

James William Wassell was born on 18 March 1841 in Hampshire, UK. His father was Joseph Wassell [1814-1892], a labourer, who in 1837 had married Jane (née Chandler) [1818-1892]. Both parents were born and died in Fareham, Hampshire - and the union produced James' eleven siblings:

Martha Jane	[1837-1916]
James	[1839-1839]
Mary	[1843-1909]
Joseph	[1844-1925]

*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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George	[1846-1925]
John	[1848-1849]
Thomas	[1850-1938]
Alice	[1852-1920]
Charles	[1854-1938]
Sarah	[1857-1930]
Arthur	[1860-1938]

In the 1861 English census, at age 20, James' occupation was listed as a "Post Letter Carrier". He migrated to Australia in January 1864, apparently alone. In that year he was sworn-in as a Queensland Police Constable.

In 1867 James married Rebecca (née Lake) [1844-1898] in Brisbane. They had eight children:

Edith	[1868-1950] who appears to have remained single and was living with her father in 1921.
James Lake	[1869-1938] who became a prominent barrister and was unmarried and living with his father in 1921.
Bertha	[1871-1955] who appears to have remained single and was living with her father in 1921.
Joseph Leathom	[1873-1915] Graduated in medicine from Sydney University in 1897. Married in 1901. In addition to being appointed a Captain as a Collector of Customs in the Torres Strait in 1914, he had served until his untimely death as the Thursday Island Government Quarantine and Medical Officer, and was a "well-respected and beloved member of the Thursday Island and Torres Strait communities"
Arthur	[1874-1875]
Albert	[1876-1912] a marine engineer. He was the Second Engineer on board the SS <i>Koombana</i> which was lost at sea, 20 March 1912, North of Port Hedland. <sup>1</sup>
John Malcolm	[1882-1945] an electrical engineer. He was a munitions worker 1915-17, and later lived at Babinda
Charles Ernest <sup>2</sup>	[1889-1944] Graduated in Medicine from Sydney University in 1913. Lived in Sydney. Died in Brisbane.

The family lived at Lytton, and later at "Rangiora", Little Chester Street, Teneriffe.

James Wassell is listed in the 1871 Police *Blue Book* as a Sub-Inspector of the Water Police with a salary of 200 pounds per annum with quarters on board the '*Proserpine*'. With this rank he was the first appointed Superintendent of the vessel - a boys' reformatory moored at the mouth of the Brisbane River, and his wife Rebecca was appointed as the Matron.

At some stage James moved to the Queensland Customs Service, where he retired from a senior position in 1899. He then carved out a second career in business and public service. Among the positions he held were:

- A director of the City and Suburban Building Society from 1900 – including being its Chairman for several years after 1915 (fellow Club Life Member Lieutenant Colonel R.G. Groom VD was the auditor!)
- Appointment as a Justice of the Peace in 1902. In those days Justices performed many magisterial and quasi-judicial roles
- Chairman of Committee Royal Society of St George in 1902
- Trustee of the Brisbane General Cemetery in 1909
- Chairman of the Institute of Social Service in 1911

<sup>1</sup> SS *Koombana* was lost during a tropical cyclone killing 74 passengers and 76 crew – in almost certainly Australia's worst weather-related maritime disaster in the twentieth century.

<sup>2</sup> Lieutenant Colonel C.E. Wassell DSO AAMC. AIF 1915-18, including 1 Field Ambulance at Gallipoli, DADMS 3<sup>rd</sup> Division, and command of 12 Field Ambulance in France. DSO awarded in 1917.

No record could be located of James' military service in either the Queensland or Commonwealth (unlikely due to his age) military or naval forces. It is possible that with his links to the Water Police and to the Customs Service, that he was a member of the Naval reserve of Queensland. It remains difficult to precisely ascertain the derivation of his rank of Lieutenant (army or navy) and award of the Volunteer Decoration. The Customs Services at State and later Commonwealth level had a form of rank structure, and this may have been its derivation.

It is believed that James Wassell was a founding member of the Club in 1892. He does not appear to have held any position or office in the Club. His election to Life Membership is consistent with that honour being afforded to Founding Members at some time after 1910.

James William Wassell died on 12 January 1926 in Brisbane.

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
- Trove
- NAA and AWM