



Lieutenant H. M. CHESTER

[1832 – 1914]



Lieutenant Chester is believed to be a Founding Member of the Club in 1892

Lieutenant Chester was elected to Life Membership of the Club between 1910 and 1914

Henry Marjoribanks Chester was born on 30 December 1832 in London. His father was William Chester [1787-1836] curate of the Cripplegate Parish Church, London. He was born in Northhamptonshire and died in Bengal. His mother was Mary Anne (née Harcourt) [1790-1854] She was born in Huntingdonshire, and died in Boulogne, France. Henry was the seventh of the eight children in the family - six sisters and one brother.

He was educated at Christ's Hospital, the London School in Newgate Street, and the Royal Mathematical School.

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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At St Luke's Church, Chelsea, on 4 December 1860 he had married a widow, Egbertha Emily Wardell (née Lucas) [1828-1897]. She had been born in Mumbai, India, and died in Brisbane.

They had three sons:

- Harry Neville Ogilvie [1861- 1902] Born in London and died in Port Moresby, Civil Servant in Port Moresby. In 1894 in Brisbane he married Florence Louise May (née Foran) [b.1869]. She was born in Rockhampton and died in Cairns. They had one daughter born in Brisbane, and one son – the first white boy born in Port Moresby.
- Charles Leviston Coplestone [1863-1956] Born in Kent, England and died in Mareeba, Queensland. Bank manager. In 1889 in Brisbane he married Bridget Anna (née Lawless) [1853-1937]. She was born in Maitland NSW and died in Brisbane. They had 2 sons.
- Gerald Harcourt [186x-1936] Born Brisbane and died in Sydney.

Aged 13 Henry was indentured into the Merchant Navy on ship “Mary Taylor”, on the completion of which he entered the Naval Service of the British East India Company (“The Indian Navy”) in 1849. He remained an officer in it (and its successor “Her Majesty’s Indian Navy”) until 1862. During this period, he saw service in the Persian Gulf, took part in the suppression of piracy and slave-running, and was for a time political agent at the court of Oman and Muscat.

He resumed his military career some twenty years later. In April 1885 Chester was transferred to Cairns, where he promoted the formation of a Volunteer Defence Corps, one of several formed then in Queensland through fear of Russian designs, and served as a Lieutenant - thus having the distinction of serving as a Lieutenant in both the Navy and the Army

In 1862 Chester decided to migrate to Queensland. After working in the Brisbane branch of the Union Bank of Australia, he entered the public service in January 1866. At first in the Lands Department he was responsible for surveying the town sites of Charleville and Cunnamulla, and then became government land agent at Gladstone in 1867 and Gympie in 1868.

In January 1869 he was appointed police magistrate at Somerset, on the northern tip of Cape York Peninsula, but resigned in August 1870 and quit the civil service for five years. He returned to Somerset in September 1875. It was a decaying settlement frequented by a rough assortment of pearlers, blackbirders, and bêche-de-mer fishers, and on Chester's advice the Queensland government transferred his headquarters in 1877 to a more central position at Thursday Island.

In March 1883. Sir Thomas McIlwraith, disturbed by Britain's reluctance to annex a promising field for investment in Papua, sent orders to Chester to go immediately to the infant settlement of Port Moresby and take possession of the unoccupied eastern half of New Guinea. Sailing north in the *Pearl*, Chester planted the Union Jack at Port Moresby on 4 April 1883 and, as befitted an old naval officer, took the opportunity of shelling a warlike party of Motu who were thought to threaten the security of the port. This act of occupation was later disowned by the British government, who delayed claiming any part of New Guinea until after German annexation of the north-east in 1884.



'Hoisting the British Flag in New Guinea, 1883: Mr Chester, Queensland Magistrate, Calling for Three Cheers', (1901). British civil servant Henry Marjoribanks Chester (1832-1914) proclaims the sovereignty of Queen Victoria. Chester annexed the island of New Guinea on behalf of the Queensland Government on 4 April 1883.

In June 1887 the Griffith government was moved to transfer him to Cloncurry. Rather than accept demotion to such a remote post, Chester tendered his resignation, and in November the government appointed him police magistrate at the new Croydon goldfield. He was transferred in 1891 to Cooktown and in 1898 to Clermont. He remained at Clermont until transferred in 1902 to Gladstone. He retired in 1903 after serving as a Police Magistrate for 38 years.

Lieutenant Chester is recorded as being a Foundation Member of the Club. He is not recorded as having held any positions on the Club Committee; and was admitted to Life Membership at some time after 1910 and presumably before his death in 1914.

Lieutenant Henry Marjoribanks Chester died in Brisbane on 3 October 1914.

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
- G. C. Bolton, 'Chester, Henry Marjoribanks (1832-1914)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/chester-henry-marjoribanks-3199/text4805>, published first in hardcopy 1969, accessed online 21 October 2020
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