

Stories from the Honour Boards

Stories of those who served and are remembered on the Honour Boards in the Merrington Anzac Memorial Peace Chapel at Saint Andrew's Uniting Church

Booklet Number 138

EDWARD BOYD

CULLEN

1895 - 1988



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Corner Ann and Creek Streets
Brisbane QLD 4000
2016

Gunner Edward Boyd ('Bill') Cullen

Edward Boyd Cullen – referred to as 'Bill' to distinguish him from his grandfather of identical name – was born in 1895 in Hamilton, Brisbane. Both his grandfather and his father were prominent in different fields of the Queensland public service, and the family attended Saint Andrew's Church on the corner of Ann and Creek Streets in the city.

Bill was an engineering student when he enlisted in the 1st AIF in December 1915. Serving as a gunner in the 12th Field Artillery Brigade (FAB), he was severely wounded near Bullecourt in France early in April 1917 - losing his left eye and suffering significant permanent hearing loss.

Despite the challenges this must have presented, Bill completed his engineering degree and became an expert in wharf design and construction, overseeing development of many of the substantial, commercial wharves at locations such as Hamilton, Bulimba and Pinkenba on the Brisbane River. Today the engineering group Cullen Grummitt and Roe, operating internationally, carries on his professional legacy.

Family background



Edward Boyd Cullen

Bill's grandfather Edward Boyd Cullen (1827-1893) was born in Scotland, and qualified as an accountant. He emigrated to Australia in 1849 and joined the Queensland Treasury in 1861, quickly rising to chief clerk and then under-secretary from 1877-1893.

One newspaper obituary said ‘Mr Cullen’s integrity, zeal and singleness of purpose were admitted by all; and the colony has probably never had in its service a more able or devoted public officer’.



*Bill's father
Edward Cullen*

Bill's father Edward Alexander Ernest Cullen (1861-1950) was born in Brisbane, attended the Brisbane Grammar School, and married Mary Margaret (nee Cullen and formerly Robinson) in Stanthorpe in 1892. He forged a notable career as an engineer in the Queensland Public Service – being principal engineer of the Department of Marine from 1893 and chief engineer of the Department of Harbours and Rivers from 1900.

After retiring from the Department he was awarded the Imperial Service Order in 1932. More details of his work and achievements are set out in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, and in 2013 he was inducted into Queensland Engineers Hall of Fame.

Early life

Bill was born in the family home The Haven in Whyenbah Road, Hamilton on 11 September 1895.

During the years 1909-1912 he was a student at the Brisbane Grammar School, passing the Junior examination in 1911, but leaving sometime during 1912 to work in Cairns for CN Boulton, engineer for the local Harbour Board, on the erection of concrete wharves.

According to University of Queensland academic records Bill matriculated in March 1914 into Engineering (although BGS records suggest 1912 and the University Roll of Service 1913). In any case, in 1915 in the Engineering Faculty he passed four subjects - applied mathematics, chemistry, physics, and geology and mineralogy.

Enlistment and embarkation

Bill didn't celebrate his University results for very long - on 8 December 1915, with parental consent because he was under 21, he enlisted in the 1st AIF. He was 175cms tall, weighed 63kg, had grey eyes and brown hair, and his religion was Presbyterian.

Appointed as a gunner, Bill embarked in Sydney on HMAT A8 *Argyllshire* on 11 May 1916. Once in the UK a period of training for conditions on the western front was completed, and the 9th Field Artillery Brigade (FAB) – in which Bill had trained - embarked for France in December 1916.

France

In the bitter cold of that European winter, the Australian artillery underwent a major re-organisation. Bill ended up in the 45th Battery, one of the four batteries in the 12th FAB, on 4 February 1917.

Later in February the Germans staged a withdrawal towards the Hindenburg Line, and the Allied pursuit involved the artillery in an arduous slog through muddy shell torn country and occasional clashes with the enemy, until the Hindenburg Line was reached. The 12th FAB then supported the taking of the villages of Lagnicourt and Noreuil, as part of preparations for a major attack on Bullecourt.



*An 18 pounder
gun firing near
Noreuil,
1917.*

AWM E6000

On 5 and 6 April 1917 the 12th FAB moved forward to hastily prepared positions in relatively exposed ground, and German shelling drew casualties, among them Bill Cullen, with severe damage to his left eye and hearing. The eye had to be removed and a glass one inserted. He was repatriated to the UK where he spent time in the Exeter Grouped Auxiliary Hospital.

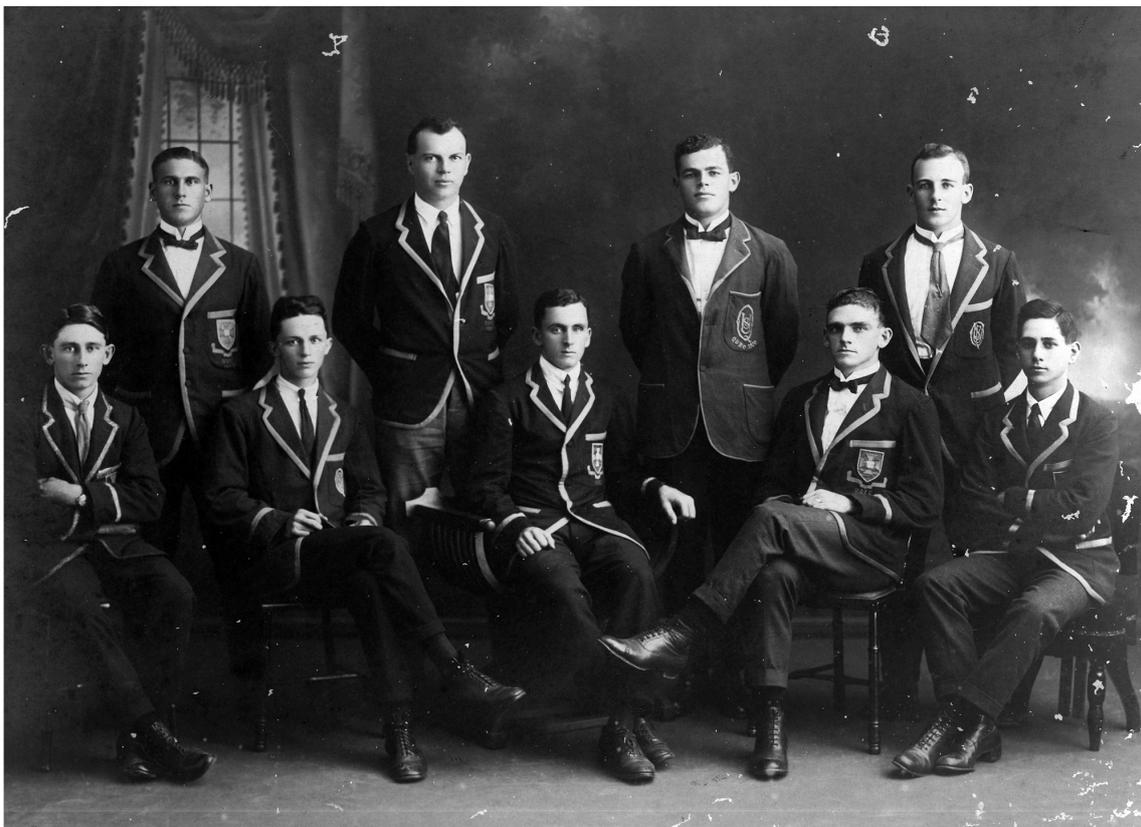
After arriving back in Australia on HMAT *Nestor* A71 in September 1917, Bill was discharged on medical grounds on 27 October 1917.

Return to engineering

In 1919, Bill resumed his engineering studies at the University of Queensland, did some practical work in 1920 with Sydney Harbours, and graduated Bachelor of Civil Engineering in June 1922.



He was also active in the University rowing club, and in 1921 was stroke for the University VIII, as well as club captain.



*Rowing Club, University of Queensland VIII, 1921.
EB Cullen seated in the middle.*

(UQ Archives)

After graduating, Bill was a cadet on the staff of the Sydney Harbour Trust for a period, but returned to Queensland to work for TJ O'Donoghue, a nautical surveyor for the Harbours and Rivers Department, in conducting a survey of Keppel Bay.

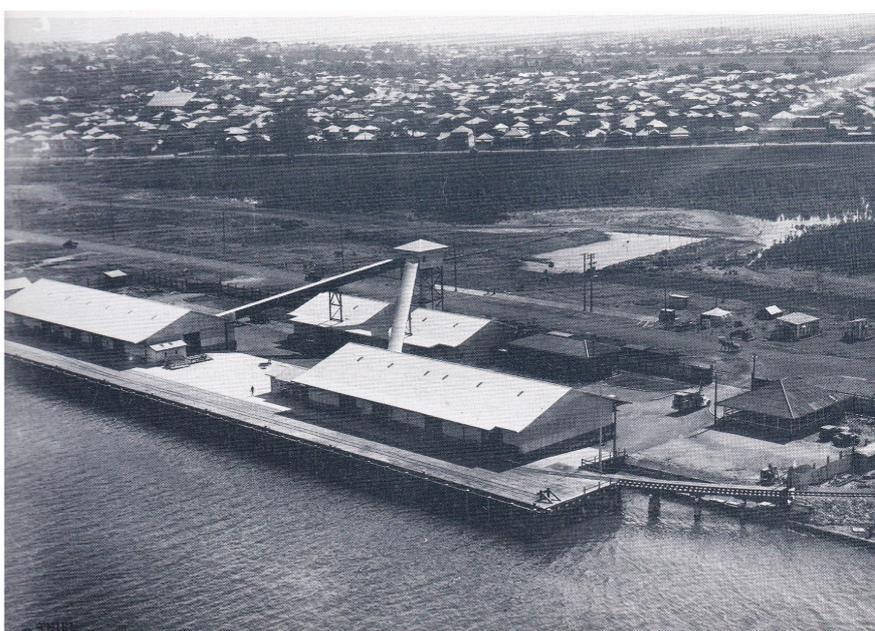
With academic qualifications and practical experience that, like his father, included surveying, Bill then commenced in private practice as a consulting engineer in 1924. Interestingly, in 1923 there were no consulting engineers in Brisbane, but in 1924 Bill was one of three engineers who took up private consultancy, and all three enterprises are still operating today (the other two being John Wilson and Partners, and RJ McWilliam).

Wharf specialist

Bill's career then converged with some of the planning work done by his father – who had shaped the flow of the river with carefully curved rock walls of volcanic tuff rock quarried from Kangaroo Point and, alert to the increasing size and draught of ships, had in 1913 'obtained consent to the reclamation of land at Hamilton and, against considerable opposition, organised the progressive transfer of port facilities downstream'.

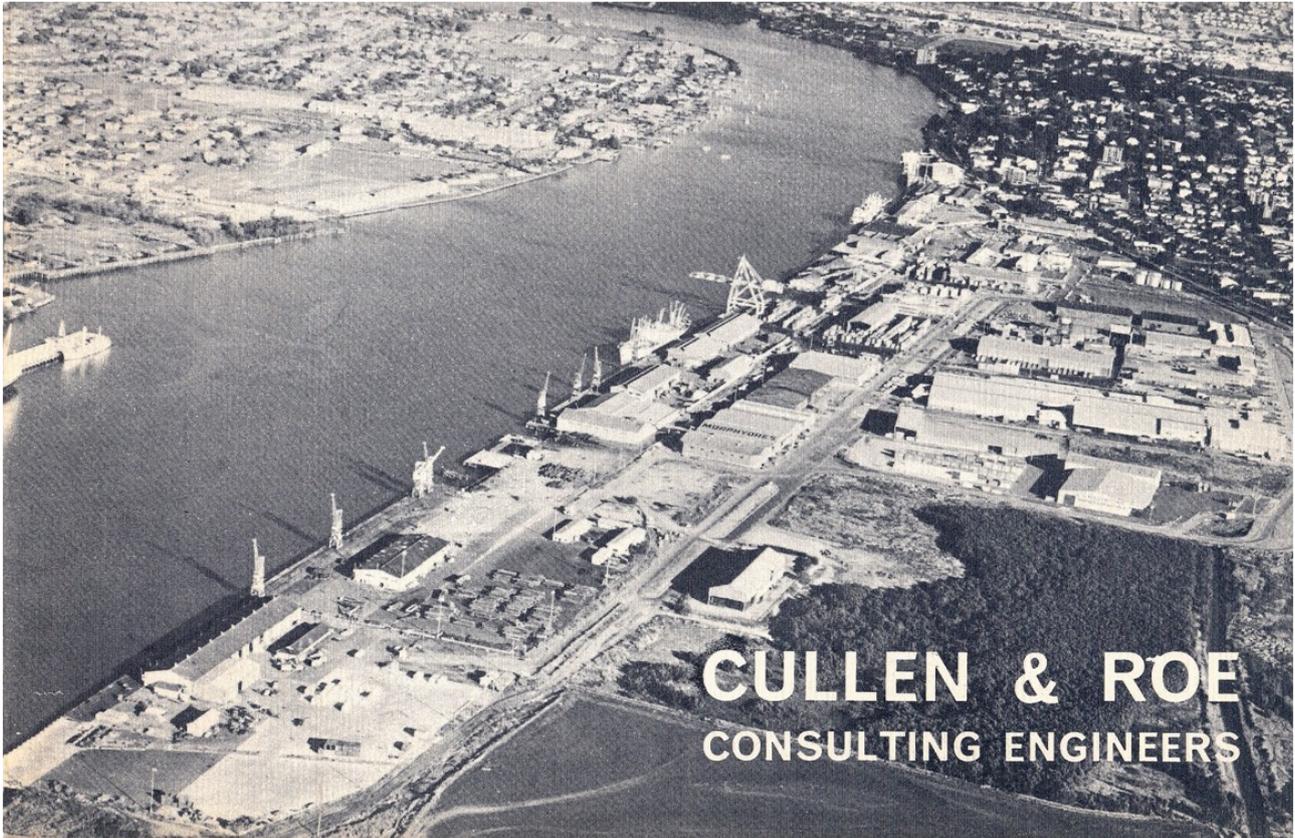
Nearly all the major wharves in Brisbane were privately owned, mostly by shipping companies, and Bill specialised in wharf building for these companies. He quickly came to be viewed by many as the expert on the Brisbane river.

By 1937 Bill had designed wharves and associated facilities for Mercantile, Brett's, Brisbane Stevedoring Co., Shell, Vacuum Oil, Commonwealth Oil Refinery and an extension to the Hamilton Cold Stores Wharf. His later work included the ACF and Shirleys Fertilisers wharf at Pinkenba, although he was perhaps best known for further projects at Hamilton, and would drive down from his home to inspect progress early each morning, before returning home to coffee and then attendance at the office.



← Kingsford Smith Drive

The pre-war Hamilton Wharf, which was an early undertaking of Bill Cullen



*The front cover of a brochure published in 1972.
It shows Container Development at Hamilton.*

In 1940 Bill was seconded by the Commonwealth Department of Works to build the wharf at Port Moresby.

He was also prominent as an expert reviewer and/or witness – instances included a 1930 case on damage caused to the Port Alma wharf, and a 1937 case involving the valuation of wharves.



John Roe - a grandson of the redoubtable headmaster of BGS 1876-1909, Reginald Heber Roe - joined Bill in 1958 to form the partnership Cullen and Roe.

Bill Cullen and John Roe

When Bill was looking to retire, Alan Grummitt joined in 1967, and the group became Cullen Grummitt and Roe.

Alan remembers Bill as a thorough gentleman, clever and very supportive – and who still liked to come into the office to check the twice-daily mail deliveries.

Cullen Grummitt and Roe expanded internationally (leveraging off the long and close business relationship Bill had had with P&O) and continues today with offices in a number of countries, providing consultancy services specialising in port and harbour engineering. A point of pride is that it has successfully completed major projects on all continents except Antarctica.



Hamilton Wharf No. 1 in March 1935, set in tidal mangroves

Family and finale

On 4 April 1934 in St Augustine's Anglican Church in Hamilton, Bill married Edith Meryl Raff. Meryl's grandfather Alexander Raff (1820-1914) had been a member of the Legislative Council 1884-1910 and active in many organisations, including being an Elder in the Presbyterian Church and the first president of the Young Men's Christian Association in Queensland.



Alexander Raff

Meryl's grazier father William Raff had died aged 44 in 1916, and her mother Alexandra Victoria nee Bassingthwaite moved the family to Brisbane. They resided in Clayfield and then moved to Hamilton – the same suburb where Bill had been born and raised, and to which he returned after the war.

After their wedding in 1934 Bill and Meryl didn't move far geographically – they set up home in Hamilton at 84 Markwell Street, and raised three daughters there (Lindsey, Meredith and Julia). Bill was a devoted family man and they remember their father as a gentle, peaceful man who never raised his voice, and as having an interesting array of knowledge.



*The marriage of Bill Cullen and Meryl Raff in 1934.
Bill's father Edward Cullen is standing behind Meryl.*

In retirement Bill did raise his pen, frequently, and was a prolific writer of letters to the editor of the Courier Mail – pointing out mistakes in what had been printed, especially where the issue concerned rivers, wharves or ports.



The plaque under the photograph reads:

Mr E.B. Cullen

1895-1988

Commenced Practice 1924

Retired 1966

Bill Cullen died 29 September 1988 at the age of 93, with his funeral being conducted on 3 October 1988 at St Augustine's Church, Hamilton. His remains were cremated at Mt Thompson and the ashes placed in the crypt at St Augustine's.

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Compiled by Ian Carnell, Buderim, November 2016



Lest we forget