

OBITUARY: Howard Kerr Williams

5 December, 1924 to 25 March, 2017



Howard Williams passed away quickly on Saturday 25 March, 2017. He was 92, and broke his hip during a fall at Scenic Lodge the previous day. He contracted Pneumonia before his hip could be operated upon.

He was born in Wolfe Street, Newcastle on 5 December 1924 to John Kerr "Jack" and Gertrude Irene Williams. The family moved to Toronto and he attended Toronto Primary School and then Newcastle Boys High School where he completed the Leaving Certificate in 1940. (His father had been the second student enrolled at the original Newcastle High School, the "School on the Hill" on 5 June, 1906.) Howard left school and worked as an office boy at Harris Wheeler and Williams, Solicitors and Notaries, for a year until he was old enough to become an articled law clerk, being articled to Harry Lambert "Bert" Wheeler. He commenced studies by correspondence with the Solicitors' Admission Board (SAB).

He was very interested in flying and joined the RAAF in January 1943, shortly after he turned 18. He was categorised as a pilot and trained on DH Tiger Moths, Avro Ansons and Bristol Beauforts. He eventually learnt to fly Bristol Beaufighters at Williamtown. He finished the war in 93 Squadron based on Labuan Island in north western Borneo. During the war he accumulated 1,065 hours of flying.

Some time after the war finished, the Australian Government wanted to train as many young pilots as possible, in order to have a reserve available in the event of further conflict. Howard was asked to join the RAAF Active Reserve and train to be a flying instructor at Royal Newcastle Aero Club (RNAC) which at that time operated from the land now occupied by the International Sports Centre in Turton Road. He became an honorary flying instructor in September 1952, and was President from 1955 until 1961. RNAC moved to Rutherford during that time, and he continued as a flying instructor until 1969. He acted as its honorary solicitor for many years. One of his students was his good friend, Bruce Steggles.

After returning from the war he resumed his law studies while working for the family law firm, Harris Wheeler & Williams. The firm was started by his grandfather, H V Harris in 1892. He continued working at Harris Wheeler until his retirement in June 1989 at the age of 64. He was very proud that his grandfather H V Harris, his father Jack Williams, his son John and granddaughter Samantha were also part of Harris Wheeler.

On leaving the RAAF, he joined the Newcastle Club in 1946. At the time of his passing, he was the 'Senior Member' of that club with 71 years unbroken membership, having served in various capacities, including President from 1979 to 1981. He joined the United Service Club in 1947, and was also its longest serving member.

Howard married Margaret Furner, the eldest daughter of Dr Carl and Mrs Edith Furner, on 2 April, 1949.

Howard's years in the law (1941 to 1989) were marked by continuous pro-bono work for families of returned service men and woman, and for the survivors of those who did not return. At the same time he was highly regarded as a commercial lawyer and was retained by public companies with origins in Newcastle, including Steggles, Goninans and Brambles. He specialised in Liquor Licencing law and for many years was the solicitor for the Australian Hotels Association in Newcastle.

Howard was a dedicated Legatee, working to help the families of returned service men and women for over 50 years. He was the honorary solicitor for Newcastle legacy for many years, as well as serving as President in the early 1960s. He was also a member of Lodge St George, and was Master of that Lodge in 1957-8. His other keen interests were sailing, golf, stamp and coin collecting. He had a strong interest in the land, owning "Kywarra", a sheep and cattle property near Bingara with his wife Margaret, his sister Pam and her husband Jim Thompson until 1983, and subsequently a smaller farm near Gloucester.

Howard and Margaret were a week short of their 68th Anniversary when Howard passed away. Margaret survives Howard, but has been in care with advanced Alzheimer's Disease since 2009. They have four sons, John, Bruce, Russell and Geoffrey, ten grandchildren and twenty-two great-grandchildren. Geoffrey also attended Newcastle Boys High School, from 1971 to 1975.



Marg and Howard in 2001