



A.R.L. Wright
(RAIA c.1930)

Alfred Robert Linus Wright (1861-1939) was born 27 June 1861 at Pontypool in Wales, the son of Robert Wright, who was to hold an appointment in Holland as chief engineer of railways. Alfred was taken at an early age to Utrecht, Holland, and received the early part of his education in the Netherlands. This was followed by several years at the Bristol Grammar School, England. Having decided on an architectural career, Wright was articled to architect Charles Smith in Reading from 1879 to 1882, and subsequently joined George Elkington of London as an assistant architect. In 1885 Wright immigrated to Australia, and landed in Victoria. He practiced his profession at Melbourne with N. Billing & Son, at Sydney with Louwish & Moorhouse in 1886, and then with a number of Brisbane architects including J.J. Clark and F.F. Holmes. He worked briefly for the Queensland Government before becoming a partner with John Beauchamp Nicholson in the firm of Nicholson and Wright from March 1890.

The *Brisbane Courier* reported in August 1893 that Wright had been adjudicated insolvent *in forma pauperis* – without funds to pay court costs or fees. It has been suggested that a collapse in the property market led to Wright's insolvency. With economic depression on the east coast, Wright fled to Western Australia in 1894, and joined the Public Works Department (PWD), where his ability was soon recognised. After joining as a draftsman in 1894 under G.T. Poole, Wright was promoted to chief draftsman in 1895 and chief assistant architect, with William Salway in 1896. He continued under John H. Grainger as Chief Architect until the department was reorganised, and Wright became resident officer at Coolgardie from c.1900 to 1905, when the position of chief architect on the goldfields was abolished, and he left for overseas travel.

Wright had married Maria Lucy Virginia Jarvis at St Stephen's Cathedral, Brisbane in November 1888, and they had their first child, Gwladys in 1889. Tragically, the couple lost their next two daughters as infants. Kathleen was born in 1895, but died of bronchitis at their Wellington Street, Perth home at 18 months of age in 1897; and Olga was born in 1898, but died in 1899 at their home *Wyola* in Bay View Road, Claremont when only 13 months of age. More fortunately, son Gregory Wyndham was born at Claremont in 1900, and daughter Jacqueline at Coolgardie in 1902.

Wright is briefly listed with his own practice at Trustees Chambers, St Georges Terrace, Perth in 1907, but by 1912 had been re-appointed as a draftsman with the PWD, and then later again as an architect. He achieved membership of the Royal British Institute of Architects as a Licentiate (LRIBA) in July 1911, proposed by R.M. Hamilton and Edwin Summerhayes. From their modest 93 Barker Road, Subiaco family home, Wright's son Wyndham enlisted in the AIF as an 18 year old, but fortunately the cessation of hostilities in the First World War during late 1918 saw him discharged without proceeding overseas.

Wright had transferred to the engineering branch of the PWD, working in government service for nearly 30 years until 1924, when he commenced private practice in Perth. He undertook modest commissions, including domestic work and projects in his local government area, Subiaco; in 1927 designing an underground latrine for Rokeby Road and in 1935 the entrance gates for Subiaco Oval to commemorate the Jubilee of King George V.

Alfred registered as an architect in Western Australia during May 1922, and in February 1924 his son Wyndham also achieved registration. Alfred Wright was one of the adjudicators for a design competition for Winthrop Hall and other buildings at the University of Western Australia in the mid 1920s. He was also an adjudicator with W.B. Hardwick and F.J. Whitwell in the 1933 'Ideal Homes' competition where Wyndham received the £10/10 first prize! Wyndham was employed by G.T. Poole (1856-1934) for some time, worked as an architect within the Public Health Department for a period in the later 1930s, and eventually moved to Victoria.

In the late 1920s Wright took on the responsibility for articled students in Zoie Bennett and George Wilson. Wright managed to find time away from all his

professional duties, and voyaged from Fremantle in February 1929 to visit London, Devonshire, Scotland, Holland, Belgium and France. Returning on the *Maloja* in June 1929, he had both positive and negative comments to make on various building matters observed in his travels, and commented that his language facilities gained in childhood had been an excellent aid to obtaining information.

In June 1937 Wright was honoured with a complimentary dinner by the Royal Institute of Architects of Western Australia (RIAWA) at the Adelphi Hotel. The occasion also marked his 76th birthday, and RIAWA president Reg Summerhayes proposed the toast of the guest, presenting him with an inscribed silver rose bowl. During the evening Wright was described as the 'father of the Institute', and 'as having unselfishly given more time and energy in the interests of architecture than any other member of the profession in this State'. ... 'It was mainly owing to Wright's efforts that the registration of architects in Western Australia had been brought about by Act of Parliament'. Wright was a member of the faculty of engineering at the University of Western Australia and a lecturer until the end of 1938.

Alfred Wright died at his home in Barker Road, Subiaco on 5 April 1939, aged 77 years and was survived by his widow, daughter Gwaldys, son Wyndham, and daughter Jacqueline. Alfred Wright's service to the administration of profession matters in Western Australia is virtually unmatched. In December 1940, the RIAWA announced it had decided to establish a student award, to be known as the A.R.L. Wright Memorial Prize. Wright had been a member of the first council of the Institute in 1896, and had an unbroken term of office as a member of council from 1911 until his death in April 1939, including his terms as president. He was elected president of the West Australian Institute of Architects (WAIA) 1919-1921, then president of RIAWA in 1921-1922, 1923-1924, and 1926-1927. He was also president of the Town Planning Association of Western Australia in 1929. Running parallel with his role in Institute affairs, Wright maintained a continuous membership of the Architects Board of Western Australia (ABWA) from 1922-1939. He was chairman of the Provisional Architects Board and inaugural chairman of ABWA in 1922, serving continuously until his death in office.

Although the decision was made to establish the A.R.L. Wright Memorial Prize in 1940, the first award was not made until 1950 after the ABWA and the Royal Australian Institute of Architects (RAIA) had agreed to both contribute to the award. The conditions specified that the award would be made to a student at Perth Technical College (later WAIT & Curtin University) 'who displayed the greatest improvement in any one year, through diligence and consistent efforts'. With budget constraints of the RAIA, the award was discontinued in 2009. Early winners of the A.R.L. Wright Prize were William L. Waters (1950), Ross K. Chisholm (1951), Robert W. Lyon (1952), and Desmond N. Watson (1953).

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Contributing author: John Taylor

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Alfred Wright caricature accompanying an article titled 'Lifetime of Architecture' (*Daily News*, 23 March 1929, p.6).



Entrance gates at Subiaco Oval designed by Alfred Wright in 1935 - a familiar sight to many Western Australians (Google 2013).