



**Colin Ednie-Brown c.1930**

(SLWA 006999D cropped)

**Colin Wilshire Ednie-Brown** (1894-1960) was born 4 November 1894 at Strathfield, NSW. Colin's grandfather had occupied 'the position of a doctor of forestry in the old world', and Colin's father, John, was also educated in forestry, at Edinburgh, Scotland. John was recruited at a young age as the Conservator of Forests in Canada, then moved to the same position in South Australia, on to New South Wales, and from 1895 was Conservator of Forests in Western Australia. Unfortunately John died aged only 49 at his Forrest Street, Cottesloe residence *Homebush* in October 1899, leaving wife Bertha Amelia and three young children - son Ken, daughter Glen and Colin, not yet five years old. Fremantle based architect Frederick William Burwell called tenders for a new residence at Davies Road, Claremont for Mrs Ednie-Brown in February 1902, and it appears the young family resided there for a number of years.

With the connection to Scotland from his father, it is not surprising to find that the earliest family record of Colin's tertiary education was at the University of Edinburgh - where it is noted as his having successfully studied 'Botany – Lectures and Practical' in the academic year 1913–1914.

The First World War of 1914-1918 interrupted Colin's forestry studies and he sought to enlist, but was rejected for active service as being medically unfit, although the Ednie-Brown family has general service medals indicating that he was involved in war efforts. His architectural ambitions appear to first emerge when, writing from his mother's West Perth address late in 1918, he enquired of the Chamber of Commerce, San Francisco, as to the opportunities for an architectural education in California. The reply identified an architectural course which could be undertaken at the University of California, but the ambition for American education was unfulfilled, as in May 1919 Colin was articled to

architect Charles Oldham. Soon after, in July 1919, Herbert Parry as Honorary Secretary of the West Australian Institute of Architects, registered Colin as a student member of the Institute.

Upon Oldham's untimely death in March 1920, Harold Boas was requested by the executors of Charles Oldham to oversee the outstanding matters of Oldham's architectural practice and it seems this included the continuation of Colin's indenture agreement, and it also required Boas to embrace the Oldham name in his practice – Oldham & Boas.

Colin successfully completed the three years service of his articles and, upon the certification of that event from Harold Boas, duly applied for registration under the then recently proclaimed Architects Act of 1921. Registration was granted 25 February 1924, and Colin was registered architect no.79 in WA. Harold Boas had previously proposed Colin to enter into his architectural practice as a partner, and from 1923 commenced the long established firm of Oldham Boas & Ednie-Brown. In October 1924 Colin published his thoughts for the growth of Perth in *The West Australian*, with far-sighted ideas including the development of arterial roads, sinking of the railway and central rail station, and development of the peripheral land to the city.

Colin initially proposed to leave Perth 'on a tour through America, England and the Continent' in March 1927. Unfortunately his mother died on 21 March, and the trip was temporarily postponed. By May of 1927, family matters had settled, and Colin visited Canberra en-route to the USA. Although impressed with the town planning of the city and surroundings, Colin professed to coming away with very mixed feelings about the new capital. From the architectural standpoint, he was generally disappointed and stated that he thought that 'everything had come out of the same mould', before promising to make a comparison with Washington. He returned to Fremantle on the *Osterly* in November 1927, noting that he had occasion to study many types of buildings such as offices, banks, hotels and flats, noting that 'in architecture, America offered a fund of information and interest'. He thought the most interesting developments were to be seen in California, that the skyscrapers of Chicago and New York were also of great value, and that the garden city developments of England gave 'an indication of what could be accomplished'.

In the archived records of the Oldham Boas Ednie-Brown firm – now in the name of The Buchan Group, Perth, there are carefully cherished drawings and records of the work of the firm over the first twenty year pre-war period of Colin's partnership with Harold Boas, representing an extraordinary variety of building types ranging through residential and hospitality to industrial and commercial examples both in Perth and in country regional centres. The design author of these works is generally not recorded, but considering the close partnership arrangement, can certainly to be acknowledged as having Colin's design influence.

In 1934, the firm was commissioned by the University of Western Australia to design an office tower on the corner of Hay and William Streets, Perth. In 1929 Harold Boas had also made an overseas trip - similar to Colin's previous itinerary, and brought back more of the 'New York style' of the time. Although Boas as senior partner is accredited as the architect, the Ednie-Brown family understand that Colin took a lead in developing the design, and this is supported by Colin's 1927 'skyscraper' research in the USA. Commenced in 1935, the Gledden Building, as the office tower was named, is on the State Register of Heritage Places.

The Ford Motor assembly factory of 1930 on Stirling Highway in Mosman Park, later adapted as the Matilda Bay Brewery, is also on the State Register of Heritage Places and has clear references as one of Colin's works. In those early years Colin's architecture also included residential work, many examples of which have now been demolished. However, the UWA School of Architecture holds the Margaret Pitt Morison collection which includes photographic record of a residence at 2 Ventnor Avenue, West Perth – designed in the 'Arts and Crafts' style – possibly circa 1923, and described by the late architect-historian Pitt Morison as "a quite significant building".

In the early 1930s depression years, struggling architects Harold Krantz, John Oldham and Colin Ednie-Brown established a small commercial art business – the Poster Studios, and despite hard times the business was successful, employing up to twenty architects and artists.

In 1942, following the fall of Singapore, Colin – although nearly fifty years old, managed to enlist for service in the Second World War. He was granted a

commission and in an executive capacity, first commanded the military training camp at Northam and later the elite commando 'Z force' training facility on Garden Island in WA. At the end of hostilities, he was sent as a military intelligence officer with the rank of acting Lieutenant Colonel to Australia's neighbouring northern islands to assist in the final matters of the Japanese withdrawal. Following the war, Colin designed a granite memorial, unveiled on Garden Island by Premier McLarty in November 1949, '*Erected in memory of the members of SERVICES RECONNAISSANCE DEPARTMENT who gave their lives for King and Country in the Pacific Campaign during World War 2*'.

On return to the partnership with Boas late in 1946, he established a specialty in the practice, largely in answer to the then call of the State Liquor Licensing Authority to upgrade hotel facilities and accommodation throughout the State. His activity in this respect stretched from Albany and Bunbury through to the wheat-belt towns on the Great Eastern Highway, and on to Kalgoorlie.

Colin's post-war hospitality practice inevitably lead to other country work such as for the regional cooperative societies but was generally of a routine nature, not known for visual design importance. Important records exist in the archives of the Buchan Group in Perth from the post-war activity, particularly in terms of hotel measured drawings recorded at the time and prior to alteration, which provide a nice insight into country hotel design of the early twentieth century.

Other areas of the post-war practice of the firm saw significant examples of architectural achievement and Colin's influence is apparent on archived documentation. Of particular note is his role as mentor to the young Peter Arney, who joined the firm as a student immediately post-war, and was one of the lead design partners and driver of the firm until his retirement in the 1990s.

Colin Ednie-Brown married Hilda Baxter Cox (born 1902, daughter of lawyer Charles Baxter Cox, and niece of Perth architect Alfred Edward Cox - who in turn had an architect son Alfred Richard Baxter Cox) at Christ Church, Mayfair, London on 3 August 1927. The couple had two sons - John Baxter (Buster) in July 1933, Antony Colin in December 1937 (later an award-winning architect with Oldham Boas Ednie-Brown). Colin died on 3 March 1960, aged 65 years, and Hilda passed away in 1967, also aged 65 years.

References:

- 'Death of Mr J. Ednie Brown', *The West Australian*, 27 October 1899, p.3.
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 11 February 1902, p.1 (Claremont E-B house by Burwell).
- 'Civic Expansion', *The West Australian*, 3 October 1924, p.13 (scheme for Perth growth).
- 'Personal', *Daily News*, 2 March 1927, p.5 (tour proposal).
- 'Personal', *Daily News*, 2 March 1927, p.5 (death of mother delays tour).
- 'Jerry Built and Ugly', *Daily News*, 9 May 1927, p.5 (opinion of buildings in Canberra).
- 'Architecture Abroad', *The West Australian*, 30 November 1927, p.13 (return to WA).
- 'Central Station', *The West Australian*, 1 May 1928, p.15 (town plan, underground rail scheme).
- 'Former "Hush-Hush" Men Meet Premier', *The West Australian*, 8 November 1949, p.6.
- Garden Island Memorial, <http://www.warmemorials.net/memorials/perth/garden/services.htm> accessed 10 March 2013.
- Richard Refshauge, 'Brown, John Ednie (1848–1899)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/brown-john-ednie-3079/text4549>, accessed 10 March 2013.

Contributing authors: John Taylor & Antony Ednie-Brown OAM LFRAIA

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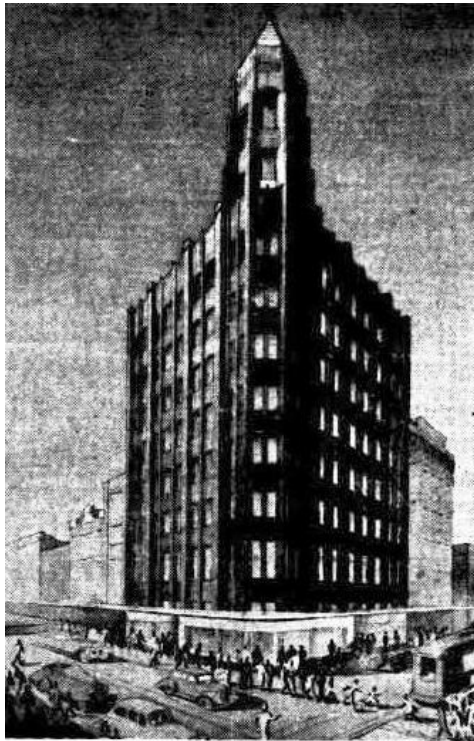
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Ford Motor Works, Stirling Highway North Fremantle (SLWA 095466PD)



Adelphi Hotel, cnr St George's Terrace & Mill Street, Perth of 1935 (1961 - SLWA 120037PD)



Perspective drawing of the eight-storey building to be erected at a cost of approximately £50,000, on the south-eastern corner of William-street and Hay-street, for the University of Western Australia. The property was portion of the estate of the late Mr. Robert John Gledden, retired surveyor, left to the University in 1927. The architects are Messrs. Odsham, Bunn and Ednie Brown.



Gledden Building, cnr William and Hay Streets, Perth (*The West Australian*, 11 September 1936 p.26, Art Deco Society of Western Australia)

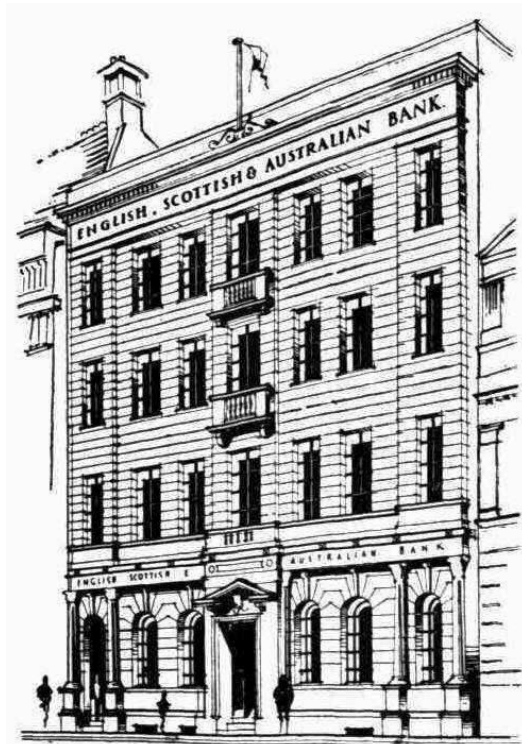


The new church for the Greek community, situated at the corner of Park-street and Francis-street, Perth, which is in course of erection. The architects are Messrs. Oldham, Boas and Ednie-Brown.



The facade of Adelaide House, St. George's-terrace, which has been erected by the Adelaide Steamship Co., Ltd., at a cost of £40,000, and is now nearing completion. The architects are Messrs. Oldham, Boas and Ednie-Brown.

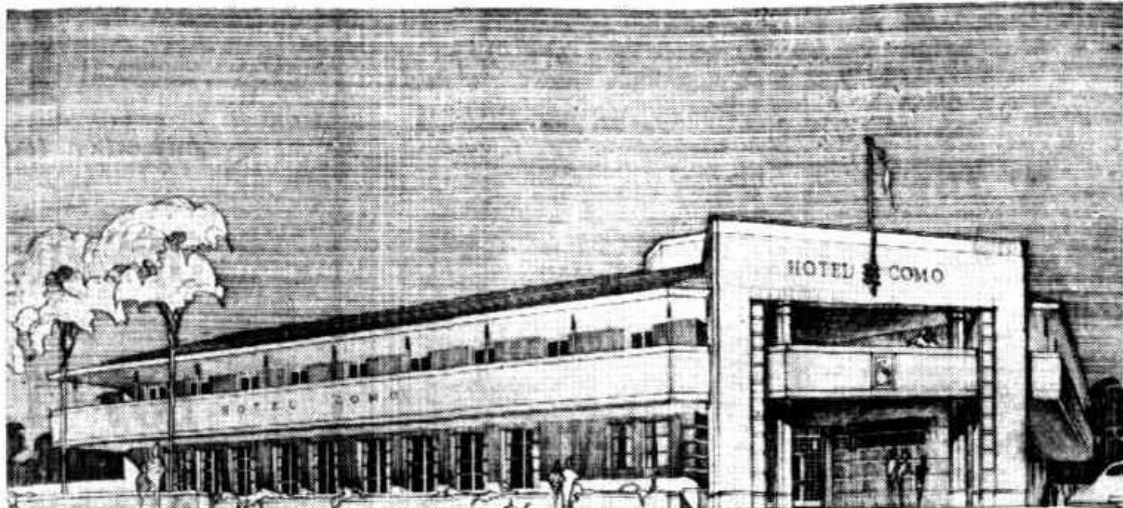
Sts Constantine and Helene Greek Orthodox Church, Francis Street Perth; Adelaide House, St George's Terrace Perth (*The West Australian*, 9 May 1936, p.6; 6 February 1937, p.6)



Facade of the English, Scottish and Australian Bank, Ltd., St. George's-terrace, as it will appear with the addition of two extra storeys. The architects are Messrs. Oldham, Boas and Ednie-Brown.

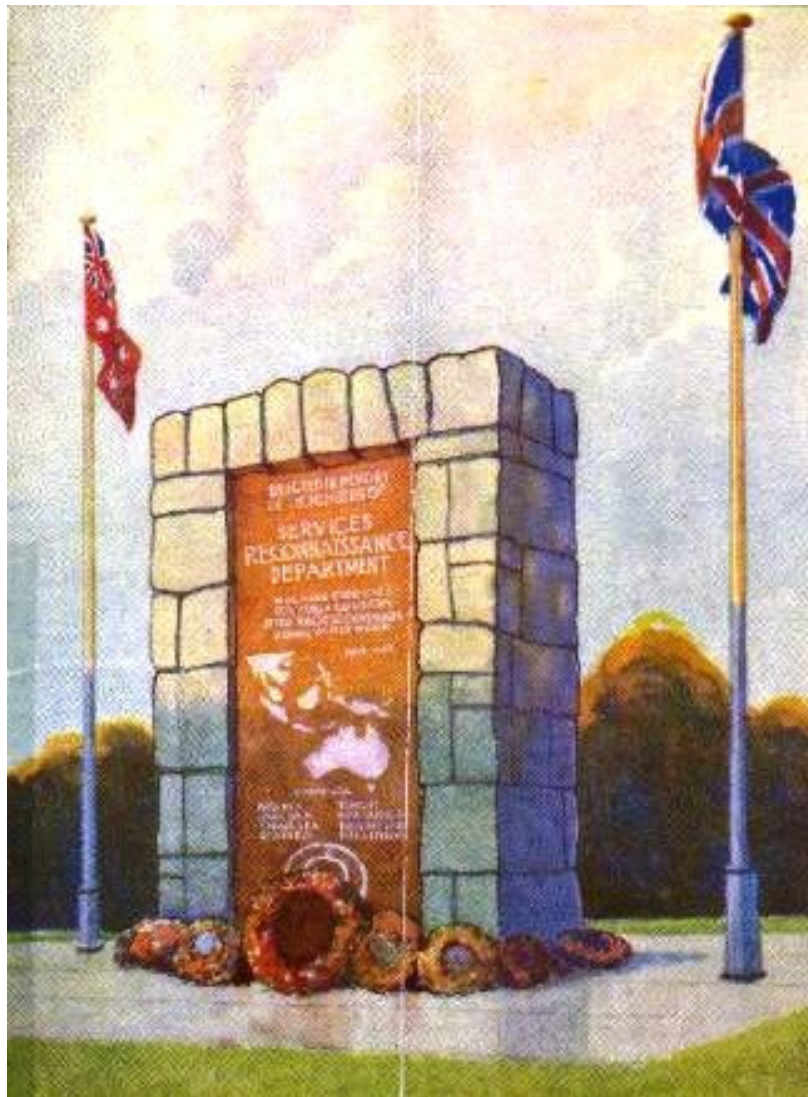


Australian Mutual Providence Society Building, designed by James Wright in 1884, later ES & A Bank. With major changes by Hobbs Smith & Forbes in 1928 and by Oldham Boas & Ednie-Brown in 1940, the building is a rare nineteenth century survivor in St George's Terrace, Perth (*The West Australian*, 12 February 1938, p.9; John Taylor July 2008)



Perspective drawing of proposed hotel to be erected at the corner of South-terrace and Canning-highway, Como, for Mr. A. E. Dolin. The architects are Messrs. Oldham, Boas and Ednie-Brown.

Como Hotel (*The West Australian*, 18 March 1939, p.4)



Services Reconnaissance Department Memorial, Garden Island, completed in 1949  
(<http://www.warmemorials.net/memorials/perth/garden/services.htm>)