

George Thompson

(*Tee Square Journal*, November 1937, p.17; *The Architect*, 85.4, p.16)

George Pruett Thompson (1913-1997) was born 11 February 1913 at Donnybrook in the south-west of Western Australia. George attended the Christian Brothers College at St George's Terrace, Perth from 1925 to 1930. A gifted student, he was also a skilled footballer and played in the First XVIII which won the Alcock Cup in three successive years from 1928 to 1930. Graduating into the Great Depression of the early 1930s, Thompson became one of Edgar Le Blond Henderson's (1890-1971) articled students from 1931, and later recalled that when he joined the firm there was only one project on the drawing boards – a group of three shops at Northam.

As a junior in the office, George was fortunate to work on the documentation of many fine Catholic church and school projects in the 1930s for Henderson, including St Columba's Church at South Perth (1936) and the Chapel of St Michael the Archangel at West Leederville (1938). In 1937 Thompson won the E.G. Cohen Medal of the Royal Institute of Architects of Western Australia, awarded to the architectural student of the Institute distinguished most highly by study. With a relatively stable local economy and future, George married Chalice Athalie Savage in 1938, but enlisted in 1940 for service with field engineers in the Second World War, serving overseas and specialising in camouflage work. On discharge from the army, George was employed with the Public Works Department on the design of Royal Perth Hospital, before returning to work with 'E Le B' Henderson in 1947.

Following on in business at Perth from his father Edgar Jerome Henderson (1861-1928) - who had first commenced as an architect at Melbourne in 1883, 'E Le B' had practised successfully in the 1920s and 1930s, before also enlisting for war service in 1942-1945. Passing the required examinations, Thompson registered 10 June 1948 with the Architects Board of Western Australia (no.192). With the practice's workload slowly increasing again after the deprivations of the war, Henderson invited Thompson into partnership in 1948, hence operating as Henderson & Thompson. Projects soon increased in scale, and in 1950 the partners commenced work on a St John of God Hospital at Kalgoorlie.

Post-war work in the mid-1950s included chapels at St Thomas More College UWA (1954) and adjacent to St John of God Convent/Hospital, Subiaco (1955). Demolished in 1994, the expensive memorial chapel at Subiaco was possibly the last Gothic style building designed in WA. Likely to have been primarily of Henderson design and Thompson documentation, the grand chapel exhibited an extremely high standard of detailing and excellent use of carefully selected building materials. Along with the establishment of the Christian Brothers' Trinity College at Perth in 1962, Thompson directed an extensive program of works at Aquinas College - including the science wing (1962), junior school (1963), chapel (1966), main building extension (1967), science lecture theatre (1967), hockey pavilion (1970), boat house (1971), library (1975), arts centre, mathematics classrooms, gymnasium and manual arts building (1982).

After Henderson's retirement, Thompson carried on the practice until it reached its century of existence in 1983, part of a team producing fine buildings including the chapels at Aquinas and Trinity Colleges (of which the primary designs were by English migrant Jim Thomson), amongst many other projects. Thompson's fifty-plus years in the profession included a busier second half, with the practice peaking to a staff of around ten, some of whom later commenced in sole practice.

Having retired in 1983 at the age of 70, George Thompson died 11 December 1997 at Como, aged 84 years. Chalice had passed away in December 1995, and the couple had two sons who attended Aquinas College - Rodney (class of 1964) and Doug (class of 1966).

References:

- 'Architects' Award', *The West Australian*, 23 July 1937, p.8 (E.G. Cohen Medal winner).
- 'New Hospital', *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 17 February 1950, p.4 (St John of God Hospital Kalgoorlie).
- 'New University College', *The West Australian*, 30 October 1953, p.12 (Thomas More College at UWA).
- 'Chapel near a hospital to cost £82,000', *The West Australian*, 2 September 1954, p.3 (St John of God Chapel Subiaco).
- 'Work starts on studios', *The West Australian*, 9 October 1954, p.16 (Nicholsons Ltd Hay Street near Hill Street, Perth).
- 'Home started for 100 aged', *The West Australian*, 18 December 1954, p.10 (£136,500 aged housing building for Sisters of Nazareth at corner Collick Street & Winterfold Road, Hilton Park).
- 'St Thomas More University College Chapel', *The Architect*, RAlA (WA), Dec 1957, pp.28-29.
- 'St John of God Memorial Chapel', *The Architect*, RAlA (WA), Dec 1957, pp.30-31.
- 'Henderson and Thompson, Architects', *The Architect*, RAlA (WA), 1985 (4), pp.16-17.
- 'Vale George Thompson', *Journal of the Aquinas College Community*, Autumn 1998, p.15.
- 'George Thompson', *The Architect*, RAlA (WA), Spring 1998, p.10 (obituary).
- Woodruff, W.J. (headmaster 1963-1968), *Memories of Aquinas College*, Perth 2009.

Contributing author: John Taylor

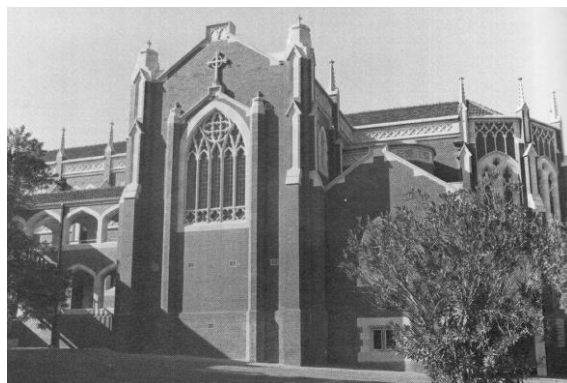
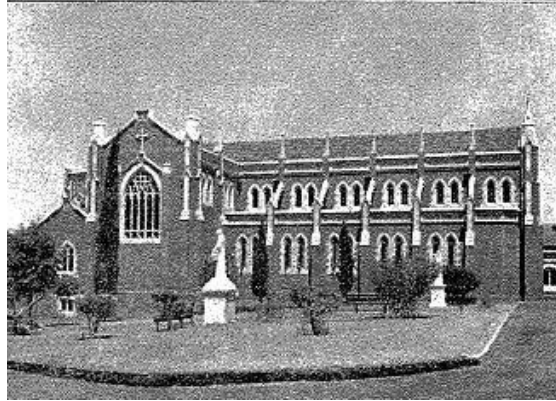
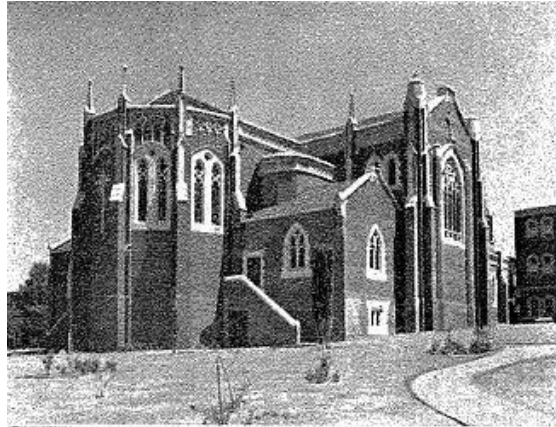
Heritage Committee meeting approval date: 9 October 2014 Last updated: 24 August 2020

Citation details:

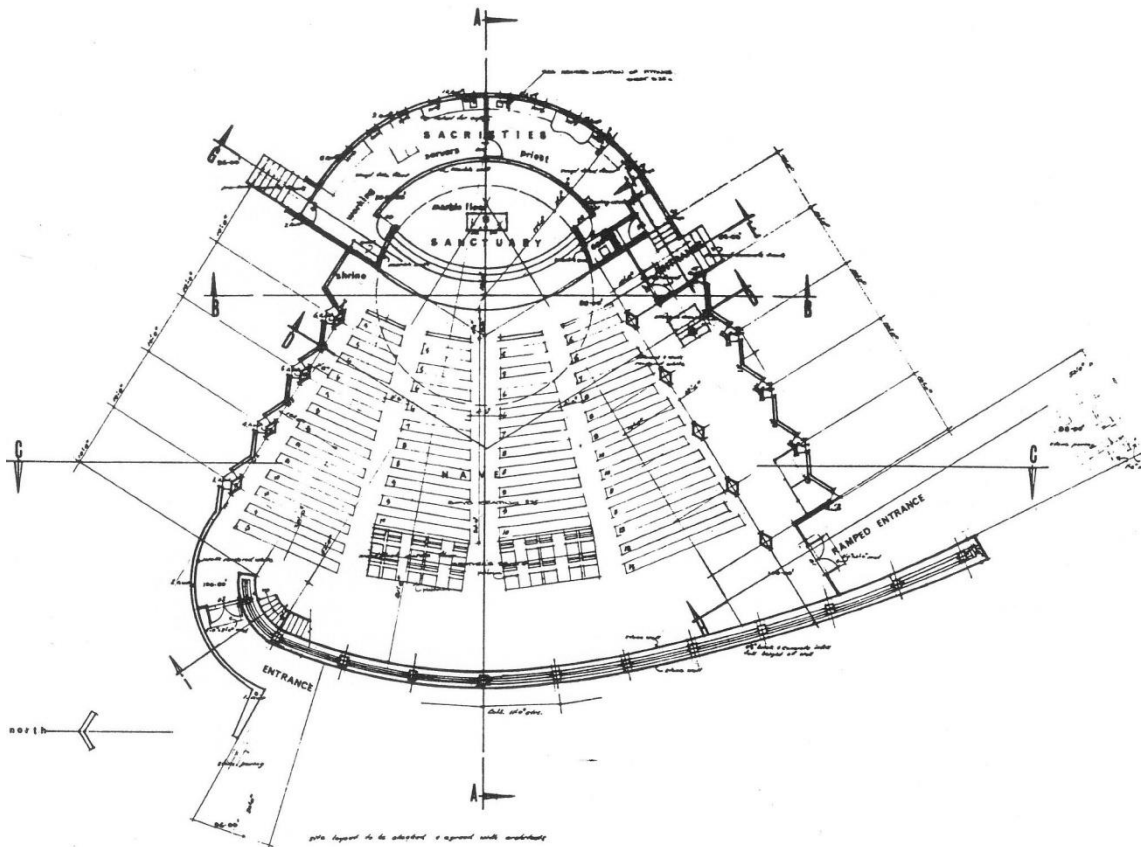
Taylor, Dr John J., 'George Pruett Thompson (1913-1997)', *Western Australian Architect Biographies*, <http://www.taylorarchitects.com.au/Biographies.html> accessed DATE.



St Thomas More Chapel at UWA of 1954 (*The Architect WA*, December 1957, p.29)

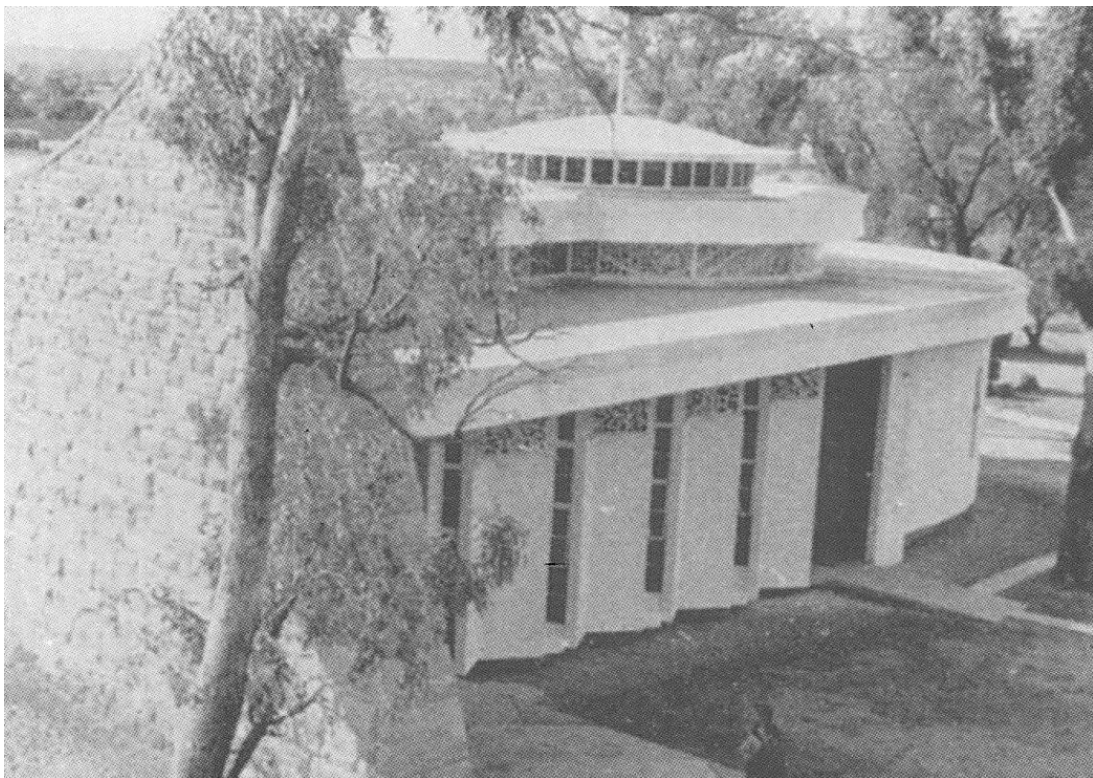


Built at a cost of £100,000 the St John of God Memorial Chapel at Subiaco of 1955 was possibly the last Gothic style building in WA. It was demolished in 1994. (*The Architect WA*, December 1957, p.30; White, John and Pitt Morison, Margaret, Eds, *Western Towns and Buildings*, p.136)



Working drawing, Plan

Plan of Aquinas College Chapel (*The Architect*, 85.4, p.17)



Aquinas College Chapel, Mt Henry (Massam, Katherine, *On High Ground*, p.183)