

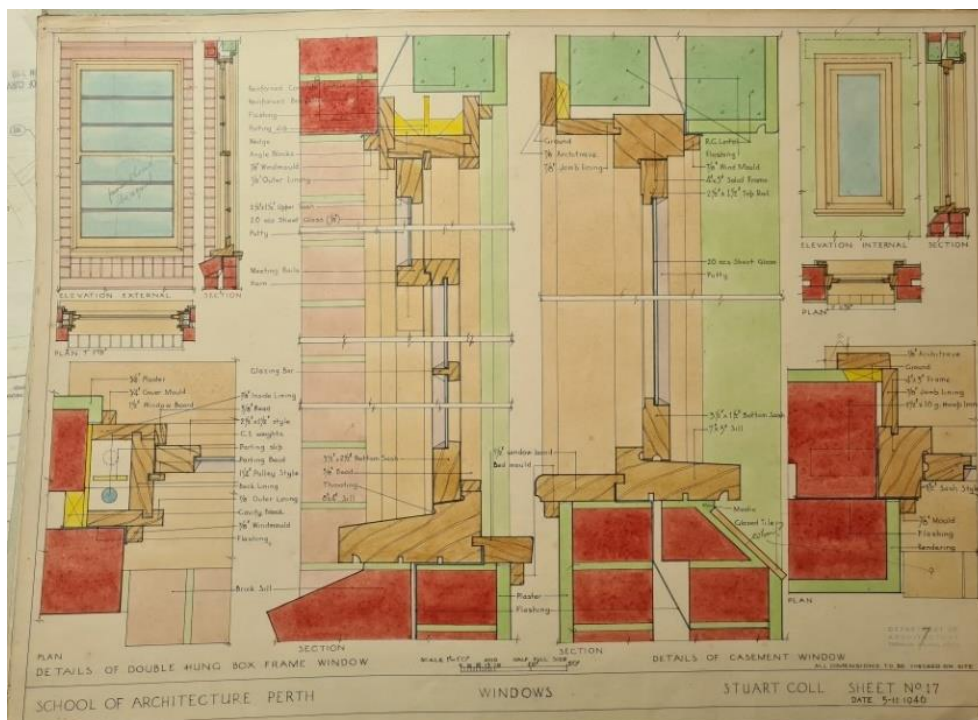


Stuart Coll at St George's Terrace, Perth in 1949 (Stuart Coll jnr)

John Stuart Coll (1926-2016) was born 11 June 1926 at 11 Gresham Street in Victoria Park, to parents of Scottish (Glasgow) origins William and Elizabeth (nee Kirwan) Coll, later living at 45 Gresham Street. The Colls had emigrated to Australia and initially attempted farming in the south-west of WA, before moving to suburban Perth where Bill Coll worked as a blacksmith, then a fireman, and Elizabeth was a seamstress. Stuart, as he was known, had two sisters - Elizabeth (b.1924), and Patricia (b.1929). From these modest origins he went to primary school at East Victoria Park, and then on to Perth Modern School.

Stuart attempted to sign-up for Second World War (1939-1945) service after he turned eighteen, but was refused, and he initially had thoughts of pursuing a teaching career. Instead, the nineteen year old elected to enrol in the newly-founded (1946) five year architecture course at Perth Technical College (PTC), whilst enjoying a cadetship with the WA Public Works Department (PWD). Prior to the Second World War, architectural students who did not receive academic training overseas or in other States, had been obliged to train in WA under a system of indenture to individual architects. The products of this system of architectural education were trained rather than educated and clearly bore the marks of the architect who trained them. During the war it could be foreseen that great demands would be placed on the building industry when peace eventuated, and in 1946 William (Bill) Robertson (with Arnold Camerer) inaugurated the first academic architectural course at PTC.

Robertson had attended meetings of the Modern Architectural Research Society (MARS) in Sydney in the early 1940s, and through him the society's philosophies had an obvious influence on the nature of the course at PTC. The war had made housing a major consideration, and a practical objective of industrialization for the Modern Movement. Robertson was also strongly oriented to construction and practical aspects, and the curriculum he organized was accordingly a very practical one. But as has been elucidated by Geoffrey London and Duncan Richards in the late twentieth-century study *Modern Houses*, the major post-war architectural style inspiration on the west coast of Australia was derived from British (particularly London) and Continental sources, leading to a regionally distinctive form of architectural modernism.

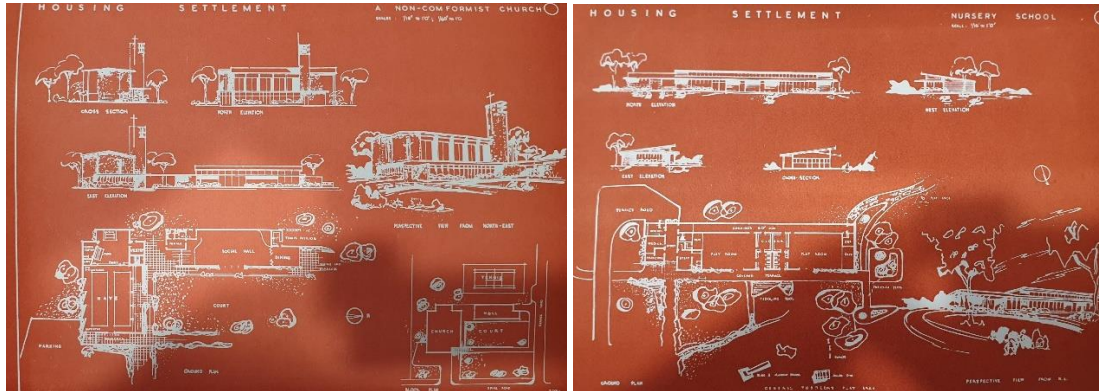


Stuart Coll's PTC drawing of window details dated 5 November 1946 (courtesy Stuart Coll jr)

The seven fifth-year students of the PTC architecture course in 1950 were given a town-planning exercise in their final term – to design a housing settlement for a 469 acre (190 ha) site nine miles (14.5 km) north from Perth on the Wanneroo Road. Coll and his fellows undertook a preliminary survey, assessed needs and finally tabulated a list of areas, numbers and descriptions of buildings etc. A comprehensive description of the students' work was soon published in *Phi*, the Architectural Students' Association of WA magazine, concluding with the optimism of the young post war architects:

“We have not only designed a housing settlement with an extremely high standard of living, but a feasible, practical scheme which should be put into operation. An environment such as this, with ample open space, would express the natural freedom of the Australian way of life. ...

After this problem was completed by the group, the Government resumed a large quantity of land in the Wanneroo [sic] district which included this site, for housing purposes. It will be extremely interesting to observe the result of this venture.”



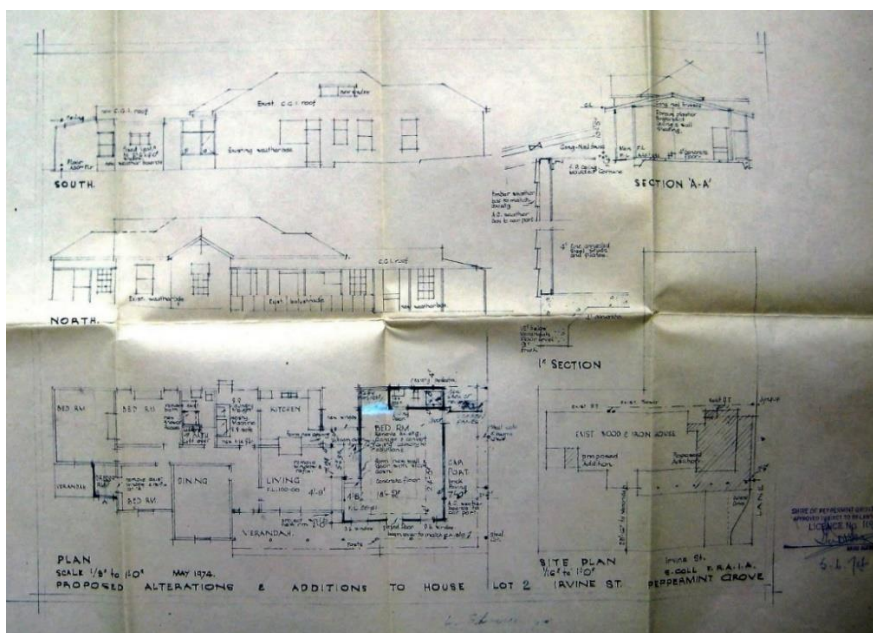
Stuart Coll's final year PTC drawings for Housing Settlement on Wanneroo Rd group project
(*Phi*, Architectural Students Assoc of WA, 1951, pp.23-4)

The results of the annual examinations for the associateship course at PTC were announced in *The West Australian* newspaper in mid-December 1950, and the very first graduates of the course were feted by their friends as the 'magnificent seven'. Stuart Coll, Vin Davies, John Hallam, Gil Nicol, Alan Shepherd, Ray Strauss and Geoff Summerhayes had passed the final four units of the course. Stuart was registered as an architect with the Architects Board of WA in early 1951 (reg. no. 221) in concert with his fellow PTC graduates: Davies 215, Nicol 216, Shepherd 217, Summerhayes 218, Hallam 219, and Strauss 220.

Coll moved to Melbourne to work soon after finishing at PTC, and his son Stuart has recollection that Stuart senior worked on the Australia Hotel. Moving on from Victoria he travelled via Genoa to London, riding a bicycle some of the way, and ending up living at Hogarth Road in Earl's Court with other PTC graduates including Ed Whitaker (1928-2013) and John Duncan (1928-2005). After initially working for an architectural practice in Baker Street, Stuart moved to Glasgow and Wylie Shanks Architects, whose clientele included the Bentley Motor Company. Returning to WA, Stuart worked with private architectural

practices - first Duncan Stephen & Mercer, then Cameron Chisholm & Nicol, before re-joining the architectural division of the PWD. Stuart was the district architect for the north-west of the State in the late 1950s and early 1960s. He went on to become the architect in charge of the General Drawing Office. This office did all public works other than hospitals and schools, which were handled by separate sections. Coll was in charge of a very big portfolio of work - including but not limited to the Museum, Department of Agriculture, Courts, Police Stations, Department of Community Services, Parliament House, Mines Department, Prisons, Fisheries, Culture and the Arts, etc. A PWD colleague later recalled that: *'Stuart was a very energetic and enthusiastic person who encouraged others to be the same. To be around him one could not be swept up in his enthusiasm. He was a great believer in good enduring architecture'*.

Stuart married Audrey Mary Clementson in 1963, and they had children Fiona Lisa (b.1964) and Stuart William (b.1966). Audrey worked for the Australian Broadcasting Commission, and the pair had initially met in Melbourne when Stuart had been there in the 1950s. Stuart junior would in time also become an architect. With their young family, Stuart and Audrey moved from 38 Kincardine Crescent Floreat Park to 42A Irvine Street Peppermint Grove in 1969. In May 1974 Stuart Coll designed an extension of the house to the western side, with a new bedroom and ensuite bathroom.



Stuart Coll's design of 1974 for extension to the western side of 42A Irvine Street Peppermint Grove (John Taylor Architect, Heritage Assessment of 42A Irvine Street, 2019)

Stuart Coll was a great servant of the profession in the State, serving as Chair of the Architects Board of Western Australia 1968-1972, and recognised for his special endeavours as the recipient of the Architects Board of Western Australia Award in 1984. A list of senior officers of the PWD as at 1 July 1984 included Coll as Architect General Design. Stuart, who had worked at the PWD for nearly thirty years before its demise on 30 June 1985, was among a number of senior architects who retired from the public service soon after the creation of the PWD's successor, the Building Management Authority.

Stuart contributed to documenting a broad historical understanding of the profession in WA through his work on an oral history program. In 1981 he and Chris Keen assisted Jane Fleming, at Curtin University's 6NR radio station, in producing a series of interviews with local architects about their life and work called, 'Plans for Life'. In 1983 Fleming received an Australia wide Golden Reels Broadcasting Award for five, half-hour programs about architecture and responses to the built environment. The award-winning programs had been compiled from thirty-six interviews carried out during 1983. The link established between the profession and 6NR continued for several years with the interview series expanded to cover a broader range of architectural themes, including a series of half-hour talks entitled 'The Dream and After: The Architecture of Perth from 1945 to 1985'. During the 1990s the interview tapes were lodged with the Battye Library, where they are available for general public access.



Stuart Coll in 2013 (Stuart Coll jnr)

Stuart Coll gave great community service through a number of voluntary roles, including for the Claremont Apex Club and his local Neighbourhood Watch Committee. Stuart died at Peppermint Grove on 21 June 2016, aged 90 years.

It is important to recognise that prior to the First World War, the overwhelming majority of architects in WA had been born and trained elsewhere. This gradually changed during the Inter-War years (1919-1939), as more locally born individuals studied whilst under articulated arrangements with senior practitioners. Coll was one of the first of the new breed of architects in WA in the highly-charged post Second World War development period. Although a few still chose to develop their skills through an article system (with Architect Board examinations), and immigration brought a small number of European refugee architects, the majority of WA architects at this time were locally born and graduates of PTC. The close association of PTC graduates of the 1950s and 1960s gave this group a strong sense of familiarity and cohesion, and many soon travelled overseas together to absorb further international developments in modern architecture. They developed distinctive local domestic and commercial styles, now gaining further study and recognition.

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