

James Wright

(c.1890 courtesy K. Chisholm; c.1905 from *The Western Mail*, 23 December 1905, p.26; c.1911 from Battye, J.S., *Cyclopedia of Western Australia*, Vol.1, 1912, p.629)

James William Wright (1854-1917) was born 9 October 1854 at Chiswick, Middlesex, England. He was educated at the King's College, London, and subsequently articulated to engineers Barnett & Gale, completing his indentures with F.C. Stileman at Westminster. In 1876 he migrated to South Australia and was employed as an assistant in the Engineer-in-Chief's Department of the Government Service, less than two years later commencing practice on his own account as an engineer and contractor. He was employed by the Government in various contracts including 'the first and second sections of the Adelaide sewers, the Nairne railway bridges, and undertook the erection of twenty-one public school buildings within a 250 mile radius of the capital'.

In 1880 Wright returned to England and spent a portion of his time there and on the Continent, sailing in 1881 for Western Australia, where he undertook the contract for the second section of the railway from Guildford to Chidlow's Well. Upon completion of that contracting work, at the beginning of 1884 he also commenced business as an architect-engineer at Perth.

The busy Wright married Ada Phyllis Louisa Light in Adelaide during May 1884. Ada was the daughter of architect George Thomas Light (c.1821-1896). George Light moved to Western Australia in late 1884, and was listed as an architect in Perth during the second half of the 1880s. He had been head of the architectural division of the Government of South Australia, but was demoted in 1881, then retrenched in an economy drive of 1883, whereupon he took up

private practice. Light was working for James Wright by 1890, when his signature is found on a drawing for a footbridge across the Swan River for the WA Turf Club.

Woodbridge, the first-class Midland residence of publisher Charles Harper, was designed by Francis Bird (1845-1937), and built by Wright Brothers in 1884-85. Perhaps Wright initially desired to keep a broad-based business, not being sure that any one pursuit would be sufficiently profitable. This is illustrated by an advertisement published in *The West Australian* of 29 November 1884:

MESSRS. WRIGHT BROTHERS & CO.,
BEG to inform their friends and the public generally that they have opened an establishment
AT
Guildford,
WHERE THE
BUILDING TRADE IN ALL ITS BRANCHES
WILL BE CARRIED ON UNDER THE PRACTICAL SUPERINTENDENCE OF
MR. B. CASTLEDINE,
Who has been for many years employed in the supervision of Public Works for both the Imperial
and the Colonial Governments.

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The ARCHITECT'S DEPARTMENT will be continued as before at ST. GEORGE'S  
TERRACE, PERTH.

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ORDERS LEFT AT EITHER PLACE WILL RECEIVE PROMPT ATTENTION.

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**BRANCH OFFICE AT GERALDTON**  
MESSRS. WRIGHT BROS. & CO. will be prepared to supply DESIGNS, GIVE TENDERS, or  
undertake the supervision of  
**WORKS AND BUILDINGS OF ALL DESCRIPTIONS.**

~~~~~

They will also supply at the LOWEST REMUNERATIVE PRICES, Doors, Sashes, Mouldings of all
kinds of the LATEST DESIGNS, and all Building Material.
Perth and Guildford, September 11, 1884.

There are indications that the economy was sufficiently buoyant, and Wright was immediately successful in finding architectural work. The same edition of the newspaper also carried notice that Wright Brothers had prepared the plans for the Australian Mutual Provident (AMP) Chambers in St George's Terrace at Perth, and for the Club Hotel in Geraldton.

It appears building supervisor Benjamin Castledine worked with his son Arthur in the contracting side of Wright Brothers' business at Guildford under James

Wright's brother, Arthur. James carried on the architectural practice at the St George's Terrace office, and trod a thin line of integrity as a combined designer and prospective builder for his clients. Wright saw the difficulty of his position, and as prospects improved he forsook the building connection with his brother in 1885. In the 1880s Wright's firm is credited with prestigious commissions for some of Perth's earliest 'office blocks', the previously mentioned AMP Building, and the National Bank of Australasia, both in the prime business portion of St George's Terrace between William and Barrack Streets.

Wright practiced from 1 April 1885 through to 30 May 1888 with Pinjarra-born surveyor Charles Anthony Paterson (1853-1898) as Wright & Paterson, and designed the Masonic Hall at York in 1887. Wright was one of the founders of the original West Australian Architects' Association in 1887, which preceded the first formation of the West Australian Institute of Architects (WAIA) in September 1892. He was then a foundation member of the re-established WAIA in 1896.

Wright's 'competitors' for architectural commissions in the pre-gold rush times of the late 1880s and very early 1890s included J.J. Talbot Hobbs and Harry Trigg. In late August 1891 the *Inquirer and Commercial News* carried note of entries in a competition to select an architect for the design of the prestigious Weld Club in Perth. In this instance Wright's design, although lauded, was unsuccessful, but he remained one of the key practitioners in the State throughout the boom years of the later 1890s and into the twentieth century:

The competitive plans for the new Weld Club building were on view on Saturday at the A.M.P. Society's Buildings, and attracted much interested attention. Mr. J. Talbot Hobbs, the successful competitor, displays very complete, well-designed and executed drawings, the accommodation for the members being also especially good. Mr. J.W. Wright, who takes second place, has designed a charming bungalow building, thoroughly suitable to the climate of the colony, and which for this reason, and, speaking in a thoroughly disinterested manner, we decidedly prefer to the successful design. He also provides a splendid members room. ... Taken altogether the plans show that local architects have much taste and inventiveness, coupled with practicality.

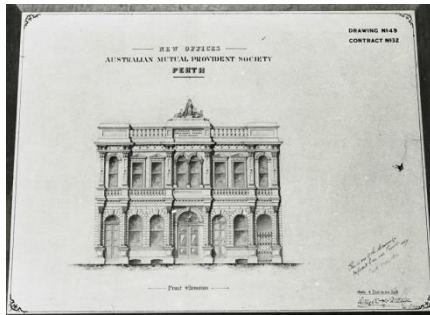
By 1901 Wright was credited with the design of the National Bank, Perth; Federal Hotel, Perth; Union and National Banks at Fremantle; Hotel Cecil at Cannington of 1897 (demolished for widening of Albany Highway); and the WA

Bank at Geraldton. In 1906, Wright admitted into partnership Thomas Walter Lloyd Powell (1864-1946) and Alexander Donald Cameron (1878-1961), hence trading as Wright, Powell & Cameron. Among the major works credited to Wright, Powell & Cameron in 1912 were the extensive stands and buildings on the Perth (Ascot) racecourse; the Gas Company and Electric Light Works; and the Town Hall at York of 1911.

Entering into State politics, Wright was a Member of the Legislative Council for the Metropolitan Province from May 1902 to May 1908. Unfortunately Wright found himself in the bankruptcy court in 1909, partly due to injudicious speculation but also as a result of financing, often unknowingly, his brother Arthur's farming efforts. As a result of the financial difficulties, Wright transferred his grand Peppermint Grove residence of 1894, *Kensettholme* (the name of the house came from Wright's mother) in a 'fire-sale' to building and timber magnate Robert Bunning, who promptly renamed the home *Innerhadden*. Eventually sold to St Hilda's School, it was demolished around 1982. Originally accessed off Johnston Street, Peppermint Grove, but with magnificent landscaped grounds spanning from Bay View Terrace to Palmerston Street, Mosman Park, *Kensettholme* set a standard for the grand residences of the area.

James Wright eventually became an elder statesman of the profession. Although still working up until 1915, his influence on the profession declined in later years. Wright died 3 October 1917 aged 62 years, and was buried in the Anglican section at Karrakatta Cemetery. The firm continued as Wright, Powell & Cameron until 1920; then traded as Powell & Cameron until 1930, becoming Powell, Cameron & Chisholm in 1930 when Oswald (Ossie) Victor Chisholm (1903-1989) joined as a partner.

With notable rivals Hobbs and Trigg, James Wright was one of the very first commercial architects in Western Australia, successful even before the accelerated economic development that occurred with the 1890s gold boom in the State. The business he founded in 1884, known as Cameron Chisholm & Nicol since 1952, was one of the largest in Perth throughout the second half of the twentieth century, and remains the oldest architectural practice still operating in Western Australia.



AMP Building St George's Terrace Perth, designed by Wright & Paterson in 1884 (contract drawing, Muhling Collection); As built c.1890 (<http://heritageperth.com.au/make-history/whats-been-lost/>); Modified but extant building at 101 St George's Terrace (John Taylor 2008).



Masonic Hall at York of 1887 (<http://www.mingor.net/localities/york.html>)



The residence *Mozaphir* was designed for J.G. Bolton in 1892. Located at the north-west corner of Irvine Street and the Esplanade in Peppermint Grove, it was later owned by the Burt family. It has been demolished. (courtesy Julian Burt).



Two views of James Wright's Peppermint Grove residence of 1894, *Kensetholme*, later Robert Bunning's *Innerhadden*, Mosman Park. It has been demolished. (courtesy Jenny Mills, nee Bunning).



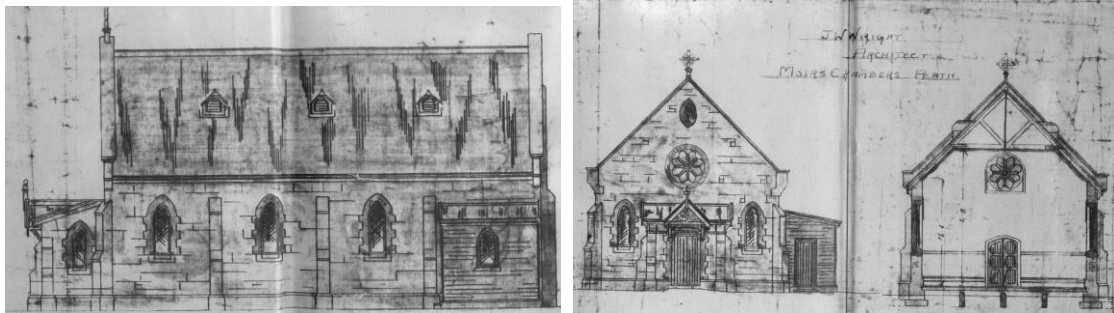
The Federal Hotel, south-east corner Wellington and George Streets, Perth, c.1905 and c.1965. Designed by Wright in 1896, the hotel was demolished to allow construction of the Mitchell Freeway in 1969, although some ironwork was salvaged for re-use at *Woodbridge* at Guildford – a residence designed by architect Francis Bird and built by James Wright. (SLWA 006626PD, 215998PD)



Freemasons Hotel Helena Vale (Midland) opened in 1897. Encircling verandahs have been removed. (Google Maps 2014).



Designed by James Wright in 1896, *Craigmore* was built on the corner of Outram Street and Kings Park Road in West Perth for mining identity George Gray. Now demolished, it was later owned by pastoralist Sydney Emanuel, and occupied by St Mary's Junior School – St Mary's now retains the belvedere. (SLWA 006622PD).



St Luke's Church at Mosman Park of 1897: drawings of south elevation, west elevation and section (*St Luke's, A parish profile, frontispiece and endpiece*).



St Luke's Church Mosman Park - image taken sometime prior to 1947 shows original west end by Wright, with additions by Talbot Hobbs. (*50 Years Ago, the Parish Church of St Luke*, n.p.)



Hotel Cecil at Cannington of 1897 (c.1935, SLWA 013166PD).

THE WEST AUSTRALIAN TURF CLUB BUILDINGS.

ADMINISTRATIVE BUILDINGS.

THE administrative buildings of the West Australian Turf Club are situated on the site of the old Hotel Cecil, which was destroyed by fire in 1897. The buildings were designed by Mr. J. H. Wright, and were completed in 1904. They consist of a central tower, a large hall, and several smaller rooms. The central tower is a prominent feature, and is topped by a clock tower. The buildings are constructed of brick, and are finished with a light-colored wash. The site is a grassy area, and the buildings are surrounded by a low wall. The buildings are a fine example of early 20th-century architecture, and are a valuable part of the club's heritage.

THE TOTE.

The totting houses are the buildings where the bets are taken, and are situated on the site of the old Hotel Cecil. They consist of a central tower, a large hall, and several smaller rooms. The central tower is a prominent feature, and is topped by a clock tower. The buildings are constructed of brick, and are finished with a light-colored wash. The site is a grassy area, and the buildings are surrounded by a low wall. The buildings are a fine example of early 20th-century architecture, and are a valuable part of the club's heritage.

THE GRAND STAND.

The grand stand is the largest building on the site, and is situated on the site of the old Hotel Cecil. It is a large, multi-story building, and is constructed of brick. The stand is a fine example of early 20th-century architecture, and is a valuable part of the club's heritage. It is situated on a grassy area, and is surrounded by a low wall. The stand is a fine example of early 20th-century architecture, and is a valuable part of the club's heritage.



Administrative Buildings of the W.A.T.C.



The W.A.T.C. Tote.

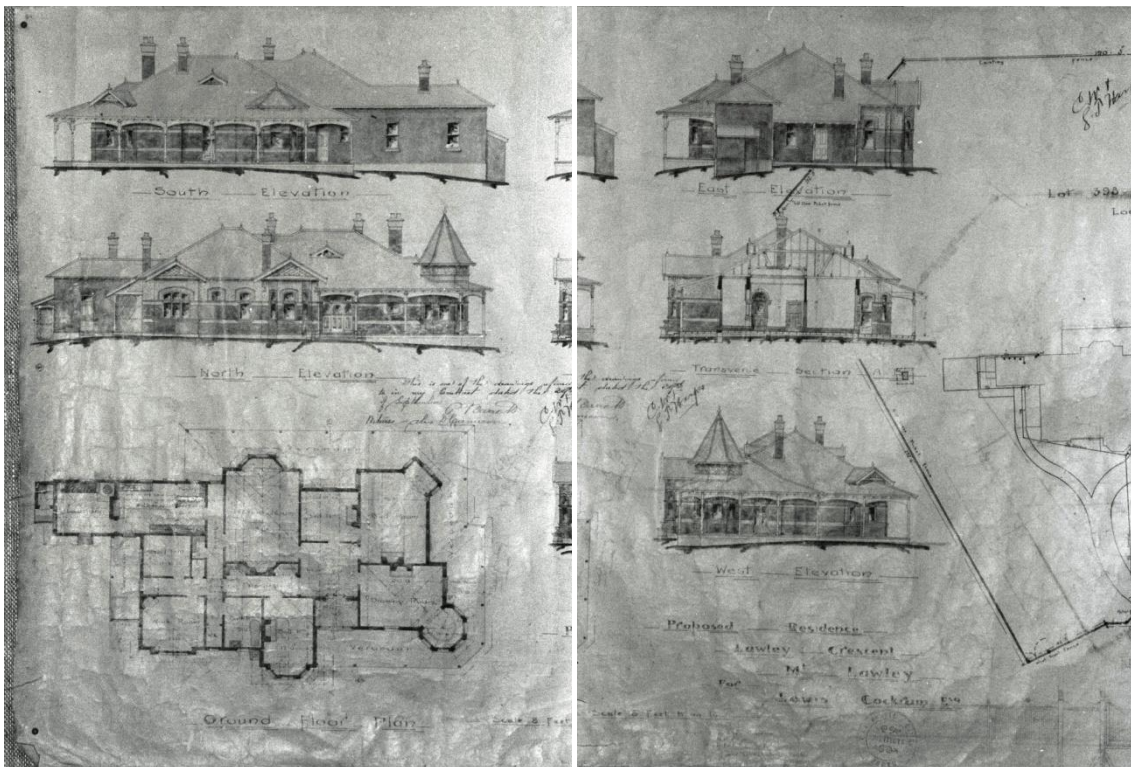


The Grand Stand of the W.A.T.C.

WA Turf Club buildings at Ascot Racecourse (*Western Mail*, 25 December 1904, p.47 – see also p.79 for further photographs).



Town Hall at York of 1911 (http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:York_WA_town_hall.jpg)



Lewis Cockram residence Mount Lawley of 1914 (Muhling collection)

References:

- 'Plans', *The West Australian*, 29 November 1884, p.3 (AMP, hotel Geraldton for Mrs Hoskens).
- 'To Builders and Contractors', *The West Australian*, 1 April 1885, p.3 (Wright & Paterson formed – Geo. T. Light witness; 2 two-storey villas St George's Terrace Perth for R. Norman).
- 'Dissolution of Partnership', *The West Australian*, 7 July 1888, p.2 (Wright & Paterson).
- 'General News', *Inquirer and Commercial News*, 26 August 1891, p.3 (Weld Club competition).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 29 July 1892, p.8 (residence for J.G. Bolton Peppermint Grove).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 10 January 1896, p.7 (*Craigmore* for George Gray).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 22 February 1896, p.8 (terrace of 10 villas for B Stein).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 12 September 1896, p.2 (Freemasons Hotel Helena Vale).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 23 September 1896, p.6 (Federal Hotel for Bernard Stein).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 17 June 1897, p.3 (stone residence for H.P. Farmaner - 17 View Street Peppermint Grove).
- 'Tenders', *Daily News*, 28 April 1897, p.1 (hotel at Cannington for S. Gibbs).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 4 July 1900, p.1 (villa Lapsley Rd Claremont for G.F. Farmaner).
- 'James William Wright', *Twentieth Century Impressions of Western Australia*, P.W.H. Thiel & Co, Perth, 1901, p.446.
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 8 March 1905, p.9 (extensive adds to grandstand at Perth Race Course for WA Turf Club).
- 'Bankruptcy - James W. Wright', *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 17 March 1909; James William Wright bankruptcy files, SROWA, consignment 3560, items: 39/1907; 89/1907; & 121/1908.
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 12 September 1914, p.3 (residence Lawley Crescent Mt Lawley for Lewis Cockram).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 1 March 1915, p.3 (new fronts and additions Guildford Hotel).
- 'Mr James William Wright', *Western Mail*, 12 October 1917, p.33 (death, background).
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