

Richard Dennehy

(Battye, J.S., *Cyclopedia of Western Australia*, Vol.1, 1912, p.632)

Richard Joseph Dennehy (1854-1939) was born 16 August 1854 at Cork, Ireland, and brought as a baby by parents Patrick and Ellen to Melbourne. Passenger records suggest they arrived in February 1855, on the *Almora*. Richard received his initial education at the Jesuit College in Melbourne. At sixteen years of age Dennehy commenced an artiled apprenticeship, and after two years practice joined the firm of Tappin & Gilbert, the name of which was changed to Tappin, Gilbert & Dennehy, and later to Tappin, Dennehy & Smart. Over time the firm carried on business at Sydney, Melbourne, and Ballarat.

By 1912, Dennehy noted that 'in Melbourne and other parts of Victoria the works of importance in which he co-operated were St Paul's Cathedral in Swanston Street, for the design of which William Butterfield, the eminent architect of England, was responsible; the Metropolitan Gas Company's offices; the Art Gallery; the Hibernian Hall; the Mutual Stores; the Roman Catholic Cathedral at Bendigo; the Anglican Cathedral at Ballarat; St Francis Xavier College, Kew; and the Convents of the Sacred Heart and of the Good Shepherd; also St Ignatius College, Riverview, Sydney, reputedly the largest educational institution in Australia at the time. The Catholic Church at Manly, New South Wales, was also designed and erected by the well-known firm.'

From the birth-places of his children, we can determine that Dennehy moved his family from Melbourne to Sydney at some time between 1885 and 1888. He practiced in NSW up until the mid-1890s, when business conditions became extremely difficult, due to recession. Newspaper notices in March 1894 record Dennehy auctioning, without reserve, all the family furniture at his Sydney

harbour-side residence *Branstock*, located in Mary Street, Longueville. In mid-1895 he was fighting bankruptcy proceedings. During his time in Sydney, Dennehy was a member of the Institute of Architects of New South Wales, and was still listed as the IANSW honorary secretary in January 1896.

Perhaps wishing to 'gloss over' the true reasons for his family and business relocation, in the 1912 *Cyclopedia of Western Australia* Dennehy simply records that 'the deed of partnership expiring after fifteen years, he responded to the allurements held out for business advancement in the Western State of Australia'. It is likely that there was more than just allurements, as the dire economic conditions on the east coast of Australia from the early 1890s, particularly in the places where his firm had previously operated, ensured that he had little prospect of continuing to earn a living unless the move was made.

In 1896 Dennehy moved with his family to WA, where he remained until his death. He is initially listed in Wise's Postal Directory 1897-1898 in practice at the goldfields, his office at Shenton Street, Menzies. In 1897 he won a £10 second place in a competitive design competition for a new hotel at Kalgoorlie. Moving to Perth, his first tender notices appear in August 1898.

Richard Dennehy had married Marian O'Halloran at St Patrick's Cathedral in Melbourne in May 1877, and the couple soon had a growing family. Harold Paul was born in 1878; Eileen Mary at Grosvenor House, Richmond in 1880; sadly Richard Francis was born and died as an infant in 1881; Mary Frances at 1 Fitzroy Terrace, Fitzroy Street, St Kilda in 1882; Norman Patrick at *Branstock*, St Kilda in 1885; Frances Josephine at *Branstock*, Longueville, Lane Cove River NSW in 1888; and Dorothea Agnes at Longueville in 1893.

Unfortunately Marian Dennehy died at her sister's house in Balaclava, Melbourne during May 1903, and with further tragedy the eldest daughter Eileen died in June 1907 at St John of God Hospital in Subiaco. In 1910 Richard was living at Suburban Road (now Mill Point Road), South Perth; and in the *Cyclopedia of Western Australia* it was published that Dennehy 'makes a hobby of gardening and finds health and recreation in the cultivation of choice blooms in his garden plots at South Perth where he resides with his three daughters'. Dennehy did not remain a widower, and in 1916 married the much younger Gertrude Eliza Coombe, born in 1886.

One of few privately practicing Catholic architects (others were M.F. Cavanagh and E.J. Henderson) in the predominantly Protestant business circles of WA at the end of the nineteenth century, Dennehy produced a significant amount of Catholic order buildings, including school and hospital facilities.

The *Cyclopedia of Western Australia* records that by 1912 Dennehy had designed the Home of the Good Shepherd, Leederville (1898), and the Church of the Sacred Heart at Highgate (1906), and among his commercial buildings were the Moana Cafe (1908) in Hay Street, which he claimed was 'acknowledged from an architectural point of view to be the finest building of its kind in the Commonwealth'; Levinson and Company's jewellery establishment; the Clarence Buildings, Hay Street; *The Morning Herald* offices (1907), later the Government Immigration Depot; portions of St John of God Hospital, Subiaco; and other business houses and warehouse blocks, besides many private residences and domestic dwellings.

Other places credited to Dennehy include the Convent of the Good Shepherd, Leederville; a grandstand for Helena Vale Race Club; and two storey premises in Hay Street, Perth - all in 1903. In 1905-1906 he designed six residences at Highgate, additions to the Stanley Brewery, and the Colonial Tavern & Stables at Northam. He called tenders in late 1907 for a Club House for the Toodyay Club, in 1909 for an Industrial School at Leederville and the Commercial Hotel at Dowerin, in 1910 for new offices to house *The Sunday Times* newspaper in Perth, and in 1912 for a Catholic Church at Armadale. His versatility was illustrated by work on the Tattersall's Club in Perth in 1913, another Catholic Church at Osborne Park and the Convent at Highgate, both in 1914.

In 1914 Dennehy's listed residence was named *Joyous Gard*, at Lot 67-69, York Street, South Perth. The principal building at St Joseph's Convent, 16 York Street, South Perth and now known as *Dennehy House* became the Provincial Offices for the Sisters of St Joseph. It was purchased from Dennehy in 1914 for £3,000.

In 1915 Dennehy showed adaptation to new design concepts with the production of the Grand Theatre in Murray Street, Perth. Seemingly unhindered by First World War privations, in December 1916 he called tenders for a Catholic school at Midland Junction, and in 1919 for the north wing and other

buildings at St John of God Hospital in Subiaco. The *Architects Act of Western Australia 1921* received formal assent in 1922, and Dennehy FRIAWA duly registered (no.33) with the Architects Board of WA that year. In late 1923 he called for three-storey additions to be made to the St John of God Hospital. At seventy years old in 1924, Dennehy could have been expected to be thinking of retirement. Yet in 1925 he designed a new convent at Bassendean and made a large addition to the Tattersall's Club in Barrack Street, Perth; followed in 1926 by a convent boarding school at South Perth. His last major work may have been in 1928, when work commenced to extend the Church of the Sacred Heart at Highgate, accommodating an additional 200 persons.

With wife 'Gertie' driving, in October 1932 the Dennehys had a car accident near Serpentine. The vehicle overturned, and she was initially pinned under the steering wheel, but was otherwise unhurt, and the elderly Richard had to be taken to hospital, but survived. No longer practicing in the 1930s, Dennehy still had opinions to offer, and in 1935 suggested sinking the railway line to the north side of the City of Perth to accommodate a new Town Hall site. Finally succumbing to age, Richard Dennehy died on 2 February 1939 at his 9 York Street, South Perth residence (a successor to the house sold to the Sisters and on a diagonally opposite street corner), aged 85 years. He was buried in the Catholic section at Karrakatta Cemetery.

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- 'Business Announcements', *The West Australian*, 29 March 1908, p.4 (iron stair Moana Cafe).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 9 July 1908, p.1 (2-storey brick hotel at Dowerin).
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 'Grand Theatre', *The Daily News*, 5 September 1916, p.7 (Murray Street near Barrack Street).
 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 1 December 1916, p.1 (Midland Junction school).
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 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 24 November 1923, p.5 (3-storey adds SJOG Hosp Subiaco).
 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 15 April 1925, p.15 (Convent Bassendean).
 'Tattersall's Club', *The West Australian*, 8 August 1925, p.8 (Tattersall's Barrack Street).
 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 9 June 1926, p.4 (2-storey convent boarding school Sth Perth).
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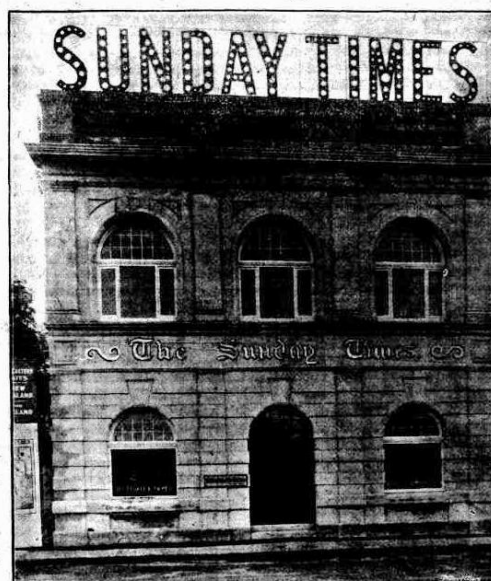
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OUR HEADQUARTERS

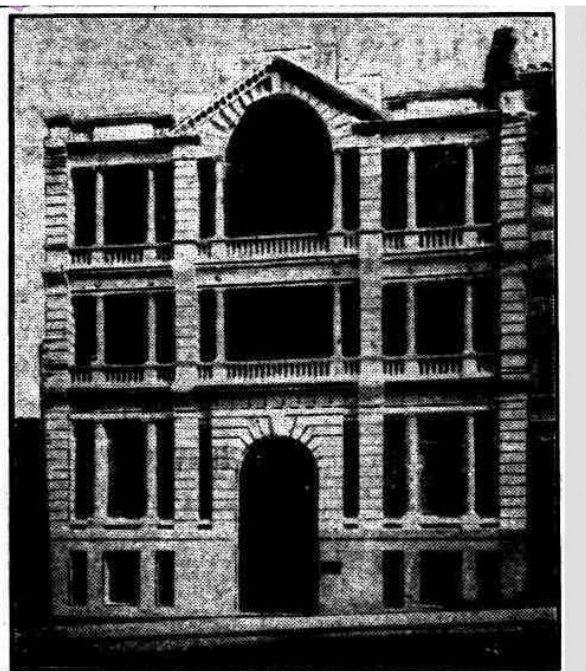


In Forrest-st, the City Centre. The building is composed of W.A. material, and was built by day labor

Offices for *The Sunday Times* newspaper in Perth (*The Sunday Times*, 26 June 1910, p.1s).



The Grand Theatre, opened in 1916 at Murray Street, Perth (SLWA 103188PD)



TATTERSALL'S CLUB.

At a cost of about £10,000 Tattersall's W.A. Club has added two storeys to its premises in Barrack-street, between St. George's-terrace and the Esplanade, which formerly consisted of a basement and a ground floor. The architect, Mr. R. J. Dennehy, F.R.I.A., chose a classic design for the street frontage, using the Doric order in the lower storeys and the Ionic style on top. There are two grand balconies in front, measuring 56ft. long by 16ft. deep, and a similar one at the back, a sweeping view of the wide reaches of the Swan River, east and west, being possible from the second floor. A billiard room, measuring 50ft. by 30ft., is at the rear of the club and there are numerous card rooms and general accommodation for club members, whose numbers are nearing 500. Most of the woodwork inside consists of jarrah, but the doors have been constructed of Queensland maple. The contractor (Mr. H. Guhrke), who commenced work about seven months ago, will have completed the internal fittings in a few weeks.

Tattersall's Club, Barrack Street, Perth (*The West Australian*, 8 August 1925, p.8)