

Arnold Camerer 1937, 1970s (*Tee Square Journal*, 1937, p.22; courtesy Dot Camerer)

Arnold Leslie Rudolf Camerer (1915-1979) was born 24 May 1915 at Toodyay, the son of Arnold Berthold Maximillian and Leila Alice (nee Williams) Camerer, who had married at Northam in 1913. A second child, Honor Leila was born in 1919. Leila Camerer died in 1937, and Arnold senior remarried later that year to Mollie Farrington Smith at Gingin. They had a daughter, Rosslyn Leith born in 1946 – thus Arnold junior had one sister, and a much younger step-sister.

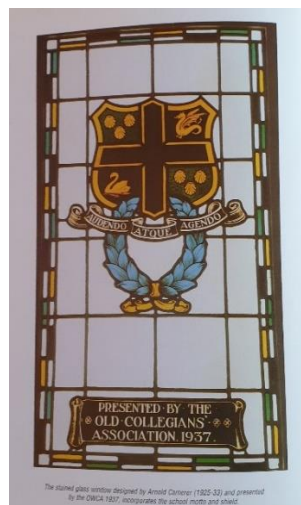
In July 1913 the death was reported of 75 year old Rudolf Maximillian ‘Baron’ Von Camerer at ‘Lichtenthal’ (Light of the Valley), the family farm now known as ‘Halcyon’ at Wattening, north of Toodyay. Of German descent, the Baron was the father of three daughters and three sons – including Arnold senior. Rudolf had been a dairy farmer and owned a butter factory, the Otto-Anna Butter Factory, named after two of his children who had passed away. The three remaining sons, Leopold, Arnold and Theodore, had come to Wattening from Victoria c.1906- as the WA Government was providing rural land in the area.

At the death of the Baron in 1913, newspapers noted that Arnold was the manager of James Munroe’s Doorawarra Station, 80km east of Carnarvon in the Gascoyne Region, and by 1915 he was also managing Balmoral Station in the Roebourne district for Munroe. Family recall that after their marriage, Arnold and Leila Camerer moved to be the managers of Eudamullah Station, also in the Gascoyne, and this may have been one of a number of properties in their care. Arnold Camerer eventually purchased Doorawarra, and Arnold junior’s first education was from a governess who lived at the station. In the year he turned six, Arnold went to the Carnarvon Primary School. Arnold’s father would drive the lad to Carnarvon on Mondays, where he boarded with the Methodist Minister and his wife, and then pick him up again on Fridays.

When Arnold was nine years old he went to Wesley College, travelling by a State Government ship backwards and forwards from Carnarvon each term. His parents didn't wish for Honor to experience the same travelling, so just before she was ready for Perth College, the Camerers sold Doorawarra and moved to South Perth. They invested some of the sale proceeds into houses and shops in Mount Lawley and Nedlands. One was a duplex at 782 Beaufort Street Mount Lawley, where the family later lived.

Arnold junior attended Wesley College from 1924 to 1933, where he achieved distinction as a sportsman in the fields of athletics, swimming and football. Like several other Wesley old boys, he joined the firm of F.G.B. Hawkins Architect, and commenced his articles on 1 February 1934. Camerer made good progress, and after a period of four years, was placed in charge of the drafting office at the age of 22. Hawkins' office designed the Margaret River Hotel, opened in 1936, and the core of this building remains today as an example of Camerer's efforts. In the 1970s, Margaret Pitt Morison (1900-1985) recalled that Arnold was instrumental with the mid-1930s re-establishment of the largely student-led Architectural Association of WA, which had lapsed for a few years within the Great Depression of the early 1930s.

A notable feature of a new Hobbs Forbes and Partners-designed dining hall at Wesley College was the stained glass window unveiled in December 1937, presented to the school by the Old Wesley Collegians' Association and designed by 'old boy' Arnold Camerer.



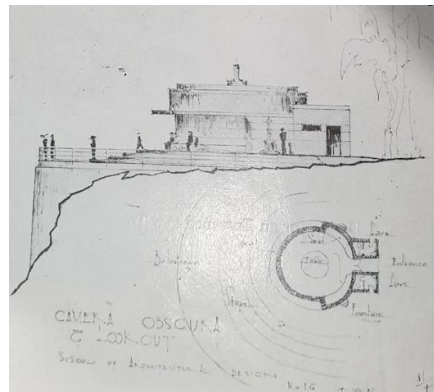
Camerer-designed window at Wesley College Dining Hall 1937 (Boyce, P.J., *Honest and unsullied days: a history of Wesley College Perth*, Victor Publishing, 2001, Frontspiece).



Mr. A. L. Camerer's design for a block of flats to cost £3,500, awarded first prize in a competition conducted in connection with the Architects' Exhibition.

Arnold Camerer's RIAWA flats competition winner (*The West Australian*, 26 June 1937, p.4)

In the emerging years from the Great Depression, Camerer continued as a vital member of the Architectural Association of WA with the likes of Allan Douglas, Stan Cann, Basil Berry, Eric Leach, Bill Durack, Zoie Bennett, Bob Blatchford, and Marie Jackson. Arnold was president of the Association in 1939, and a lead member of the entertainment at the ninth annual Tee Square Ball held in May that year. In later years Allan Douglas and Bob Blatchford also went on to teach architecture with Camerer. Tragically, other association members Harry Wraith Downes, Ernest William Grigg, Leonard Courtney Laver and Osborne Kirkton Fisher were soon to die within the Second World War (1939-1945). Arnold was unable to serve due to medical issues.



Camera Obscura and Lookout by Arnold Camerer ('Tee Square Journal', Architectural Association of WA, November 1937, p.32)

Arnold registered as an architect (no. 166) in February 1940 and then joined the Commonwealth Public Service, working through the Second World War (1939-1945) as an architect in the Allied Works Council and Department of Works. There he met the bright Melbourne-trained architect W.H. (Bill) Robertson (1905-1953), and through Robertson's infectious enthusiasm they founded the Perth Technical College (PTC) architecture course that was opened in 1946,

with Robertson as head and Camerer as a full-time lecturer, later supplemented by staff including Allan Douglas (1915-1992) and Margaret Pitt Morison (1900-1985).

In February 1942 Arnold Camerer and Gwen Lily McLaren were married at the Subiaco Methodist Church in Bagot Road, where Gwen was teaching Sunday School, and Arnold had become the new Superintendent. They subsequently moved into one half of the duplex at Beaufort Street in Mount Lawley. The couple moved to live at Darlington in the hills east of Perth in 1944, with their six-month old Dorothy ('Dot'), and second daughter Roslyn was born in 1946. Bill and Hermione Robertson also lived in Darlington, with four children who attended Darlington Primary School with the Camerer children. In 1959 the Camerers purchased a half-acre block in View Terrace, which had fantastic views of the hills towards Kalamunda and overlooking Perth, but had large outcrops of granite. Arnold wished to have one granite block in the middle of the lounge room, but Gwen didn't agree. Instead the house was L-shaped, with the rocks within the 'L', over which was constructed a waterfall.

Another house that Arnold designed was for friends, and located in Swan View Road, Swan View. It overlooks Perth, and a feature was that the toilet had a glass wall facing the city with one-way glass. He also designed a residence for a young couple in Darlington Road, Darlington. Dot Camerer notes that the 'house was very basic, built on the side of a hill, but lovely'. Another design was a simple home for Gwen's brother and his wife, located by the Swan River at Riverton, and built in about 1954.

Dot recalls that amongst her father's private designs were a number of Methodist churches in rural WA. The Camerer family would drive to the town on a weekend as a family so that Arnold could investigate the block contours and orientation. He would then plan the church, and each was built by a local builder. The Methodist (now Uniting) Church of 1959 in Quinlan Street Goomalling has a huge wooden cross on the blank wall behind the pulpit. The joint Methodist/Anglican church at Konongorring, opened in 1961, has a large painting on the rear wall done by renowned artist Guy Grey Smith, who also lived in Darlington. Dot notes that her father also designed the Swan View Uniting Church, built c.1979 and completed after his death.



1959 Goomalling Methodist Church (www.waymarking.com)

In his long career as an architectural educator, Arnold Camerer acted as Head of Architecture at PTC in 1953-1954 after Bill Robertson's sudden death and again in 1958-1959, and from 1965 until his appointment, in 1968, as the first Head of the Architecture Department at the Western Australian Institute of Technology (WAIT). Camerer was made a Fellow of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects (RAIA) in 1965, and was a member of the interim Advisory Council for the Faculty of Architecture established at the University of Western Australia in 1966.

Camerer responded to RAIA (WA) criticism in 1953 that there was insufficient emphasis on the teaching of pure design within the course, and weathered the installation of Senior Bolland and Clarence Bunn as his superiors in 1954 and 1960. He retired in May 1975 after nearly thirty years of lecturing and of leading the department. Camerer's longevity of service is comparable with that of other enduring PTC/WAIT staff in Allan Douglas, Duncan Richards, and Laurie Hegvold.

In Darlington, Camerer belonged to the P&C Association, the Ratepayers Association, and later became a Councillor for the Mundaring Shire. He also belonged to the Freemasons. He initiated and ran an outdoor cinema. He played tennis, and belonged to the Volunteer Fire Brigade. Arnold died at St John of God Hospital in Great Eastern Highway, Belmont. He had become unwell at home in Darlington, but was taken to the hospital where he died from bowel cancer on 21 January 1979, aged 63 years.

Following Camerer's passing, WAIT architect Jack Finney (who had commenced study at PTC under Camerer in 1948) noted that he was held in high esteem by former students, and gave tribute to Camerer as one who was 'never frightened of innovation', noting that 'many of the changes wrought in WAIT's early years of rapid expansion have proved firm foundations on which the courses in Architecture, Town Planning, and Quantity Surveying are now built'.

References:

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 Pers. Comms. Dot Camerer to John Taylor, 22 March 2022, 2 February 2023.

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