



Architect-soldier A.R. Baxter Cox c.1918, and in the 1940s ('Australia's Fighting Sons of the Empire', 1920; [www.vwma.org.au](http://www.vwma.org.au))

**Alfred Richard Baxter Cox** (1898-1958) was born 7 September 1898 at Cue, son of Alfred Edward and Harriet Eliza (nee Siviour) Cox. Alfred and Harriet had married in September 1897 at St John's Anglican Church, Cue – the stone church had been built in 1895 to Alfred's design. The couple had six further children – Linwood Gillard b.1900, Richard b/d.1905, twins Jeffrey Pamplin and Doreen Pamplin b.1906, Marion Beatrice b.1909 and Florence Adelaide b.1913.

Alfred Cox senior (1869-1942) had arrived at Western Australia from South Australia in 1893, and was soon practicing as an architect and mining draughtsman, initially from Day Dawn and then at Cue, the central town of the booming Murchison Goldfields. In 1895 Cox obtained a coveted salaried appointment as a Public Works Department (PWD) supervisor at Cue, worth £240 per annum, and was also able to take on private commissions. By 1897 he was PWD 'officer in charge', in 1900 resident officer for the Murchison area at £300 p.a., and in 1905 district architect for the Geraldton area. Cox was retrenched in March 1905, and soon after joined Charles Lancelot Oldham (1865-1920) in private practice at Perth.

A.R. Baxter Cox, familiarly known as 'Derf', was a foundation scholar at Christ Church Grammar 1910-1912, then attending Perth Modern School. His architectural training commenced in late 1914, when he was articled at Oldham & Cox. However his studies were soon interrupted by the First World War (1914-1918). The seventeen year old architectural student enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force and departed Fremantle on the *HMAT A38 Ulysses* on 1 April 1916. Surviving the war in France, including service with a tunnelling unit, Cox

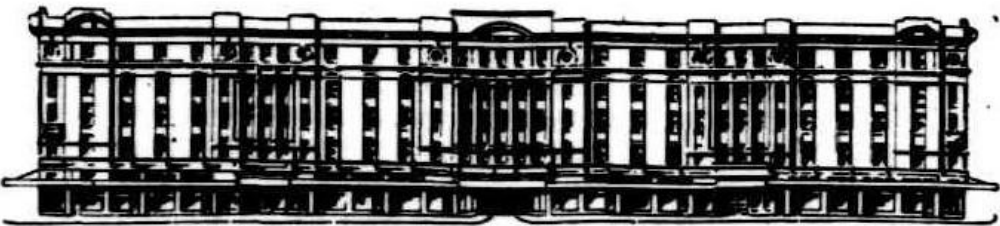
attained commissioned rank early in 1918. Following the Armistice of November 1918, he travelled to England in 1919 and continued his architectural training for a short period, attending a three month course at Oxford under Gilbert T. Gardner RIBA (1880-1955). While in England, he gained first prize in a competition connected with a county housing scheme. Derf married Ivy Gertrude Sanders (1895–1969) at Oxford in May 1919, and they returned to WA on *H.T. Shropshire*, disembarking at Fremantle in January 1920.

Back in Perth, with reduction in business opportunity during the First World War, the Oldham & Cox affiliation had become difficult to sustain. In May of 1918, the thirteen year old partnership was dissolved by mutual consent, and the two architects again conducted their own practices. Tender notices indicate that Cox senior soon took up many of the opportunities available as the effects of the 'Great War' diminished. Both the father and son Cox were no doubt shocked and saddened by the unfortunate and early demise of Charles Oldham in March 1920. Derf was admitted an Associate of the Royal Institute of Architects of Western Australia in 1921, and later served for a period on the council of the Institute.

**FORREST PLACE.**  
**NEW BUILDINGS.**  
**Proposed Design.**  
**Early Start Contemplated.**  
 A commencement will be made shortly with the erection of an extensive new

building for Mr. William Padbury, on the block of land facing the G.P.O. The new structure, which will occupy the full frontage of Forrest-place, and will have frontages to Wellington-street and Murray-street, will be erected on foundations capable of supporting the weight of five storeys. The plans have almost been completed by Messrs. A. E. and A. B. Cox, architects, Howard-street, and have been approved already by the Federal authorities. Mr. Padbury's intention is to call immediately for tenders for the

construction of two or three storeys, and to proceed at once with the work. The building will be of brick, steel, and reinforced concrete, with facings to harmonise with the G.P.O. The lighting and other conveniences will be on the most modern plan. As soon as a start is made the present boardings will, as is usual with buildings of this description, be re-erected on the street alignment. Messrs. Robertson Bros., Ltd., are the managing agents.



**THE ABOVE PLAN SHOWS THE NEW BLOCK OF BUILDINGS AS THEY WILL APPEAR ON THE FORREST-PLACE FRONTAGE WHEN ULTIMATELY COMPLETED TO A HEIGHT OF FIVE STOREYS.**

A.E. & A.B. Cox grand scheme for the Padbury Buildings facing the GPO in Forrest Place, Perth  
 (*The West Australian*, 2 February 1924, p.10)

With the implementation of the *Architects Act 1921* both of the Coxes registered (nos. 54 and 57) with the Architects Board of Western Australia in July 1922. Cox senior entered into partnership with his son from 1923 as A.E. & A.B. Cox Architects, with offices at Harpers Buildings in Howard Street at Perth. The pair were responsible for the design and supervision of many notable 1920s buildings

in Perth – including the Alliance Assurance Company's St George's Terrace offices (1924), significant alterations to the Town Hall (1924), the Padbury Buildings at Forrest Place (1924), the Mackay Buildings on the north-east corner of Hay and Barrack Streets (1925); and the General Motors' assembly plant at suburban Mosman Park (1926).



Padbury Buildings at Forrest Place c.1926 (SLWA BA1271 186); and in 1972 (SLWA 004081D) were demolished in 1987 in preparation for the Forrest Chase complex.



#### MACKAY'S NEW BUILDING.

The above is a picture of the perspective of the new one-storey building to be constructed at the corner of Hay-street and Barrack-street, opposite the Town Hall, by the executors of the estate of the late Mr. S. P. Mackay. On the Barrack-street side there will be eight shops including the corner, and six in the Hay-street side, excluding the corner. It is intended to demolish the whole of the two-storey section of the present building, and to construct a basement and ground floor, and the remainder will have new shop fronts, while there will be a cantilever verandah more or less in keeping with that of the Town Hall.

The shop fronts will be of modern design to meet the requirements of the tenants who have already been secured, and the parapet will be 28ft. above the footpath, which is slightly higher than the one-storey section of the existing building.

The lowest tender for the work is that of A. T. Brine and Son, who quoted £9,850, which it is expected will be accepted by the executors in Melbourne, and the work will be commenced as soon as possible afterwards under the supervision of the architects, Messrs. A. E. and A. B. Cox.

Mackay Buildings, located on the north-east corner of Hay and Barrack Streets in Perth, were demolished c.1990s for Equus Apartments (*The West Australian*, 4 July 1925, p.12)



THE NEW ASSEMBLY PLANT AT COTTESLOE BEACH.



1926 General Motors Mosman Park [formerly Cottesloe Beach] assembly buildings (*Sunday Times*, 21 November 1926, p.27); and a later Twentieth Century view (Facebook/Lost Perth)

In 1929 Derf joined prominent building contractors A.T. Brine and Sons, whom he had worked with on a number of significant 1920s projects, before going back into practice on his own account around 1933. He soon won a competition for the design of Anzac House at St George's Terrace Perth, and in September 1934 it was noted: *'The architect of Anzac House, Lieutenant-Colonel A.R. Baxter Cox, is another good local product. ... Baxter Cox is an artist with a practical side to his nature. Realising the need for and great advantage to be derived from first-hand practical experience in actually erecting buildings, he associated himself with A.T. Brine and Sons Ltd, in 1929, and was responsible for the greater part of the erection of St Mary's Cathedral, Charles Moore & Cos building, the University [Hackett] buildings, and the new Shell building. At present he is collaborating with Mr. R. Summerhayes in the building of the new Engineering School at the University.'*



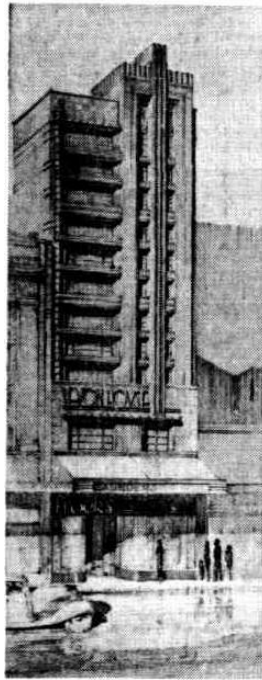
Completed in 1934, Anzac House at St George's Terrace Perth, pictured in 1949 (SLWA 000236D); 'Square and Sword' caricature of Baxter Cox (*Sunday Times*, 21 January 1934, p.1)

In December 1937, the press noted that Baxter Cox and Reg Summerhayes were working on sketches for a new library at the University of WA, and Cox went on to design a number of buildings with Summerhayes at the Crawley campus, including the Department of Agriculture, Physics and Chemistry Building, and Tuart House - a residence at Crawley Avenue for the Vice Chancellor.

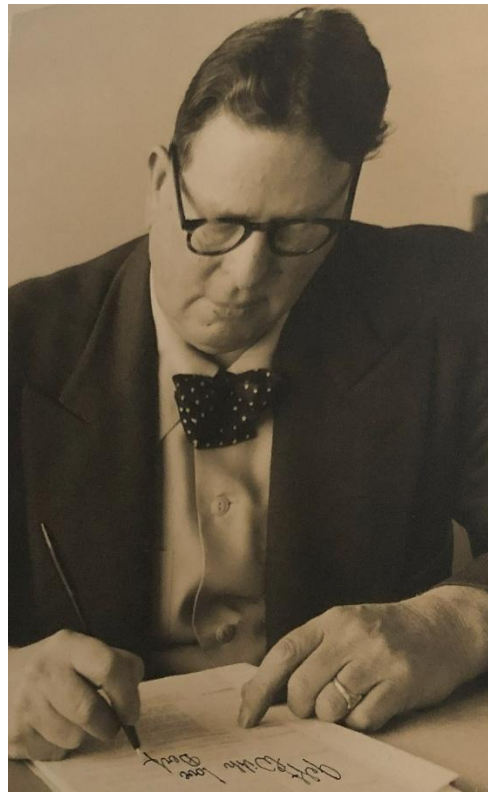


1934 Tuart House at Crawley Avenue ('Crawley Campus', p.49)

In July 1935, Baxter Cox left WA on a study tour, travelling through the Continent, the United Kingdom, and the United States, returning through Sydney in April 1936, and to WA in May 1936 after having completed a ten month journey abroad. At Sydney, Cox may have met with ex-WA architect and cinema-theatre specialist William Thomas Leighton (1905-1990), who soon returned to Perth and joined Baxter Cox's practice, becoming a partner in early 1937.



Perspective drawing of a building comprising five storeys and a basement to be built on the southern side of Hay-street, close to the south-eastern corner of Hay and William streets, for John R. Saunders, Ltd. The architect is Mr. A. E. Baxter Cox.



Devon House at 729 Hay Street Perth (*The West Australian*, 14 November 1936, p.6); and 'Derf' Cox in civilian dress (Elizabeth Cox).

Retailer John R Saunders Ltd engaged Baxter Cox to design a new building for their Hay Street Perth site in 1936 - Devon House. Cox had been involved with previous work for Saunders, including a shop at Wellington Street in Perth during 1928. Baxter Cox's calling of tenders for the erection of the five storey business premises and basement closed in November 1936. The detailing of the building suggests that it was principally designed by Bill Leighton. In February 1937, Baxter Cox called tenders for a theatre and picture gardens on Stirling Highway Claremont for Claremont District Theatres Ltd, and we can surmise that the bearing of Leighton within the practice grew with this commission in his specialist field. From March 1937 the firm was advertising as Baxter Cox & Leighton, with numerous theatre designs following showing Leighton's strong design influence.



1937 Claremont Picture Theatre on Stirling Highway for Claremont District Theatres Ltd - pictured in 1961 (SLWA 340533PD, Fritz Kos)



1937 Claremont Picture Theatre, operating as Zenith Music in the 2000s (Google 2025)

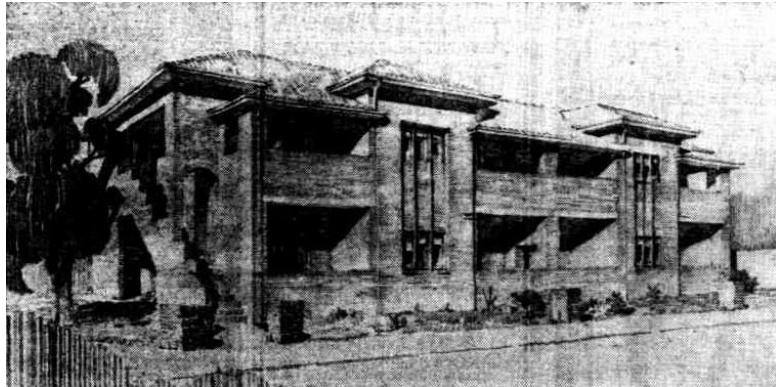


Perspective drawing of the Hollywood Theatre to be erected near the Captain Stirling Hotel in Stirling-highway for Mr. E. P. Nelson. The architect is Mr. A. R. Baxter Cox.

1937 Windsor Theatre on Stirling Highway Nedlands for Claremont District Theatres Ltd (*The West Australian*, 19 December 1936, p.6)

Bill Leighton's professional reputation in WA was established on the basis of the buildings he designed whilst within the Baxter Cox & Leighton partnership in the late 1930s, especially the distinctive Inter-War Art Deco style cinemas. The most notable of the cinemas still standing is the Piccadilly Theatre and Arcade, built for the entrepreneur Claude de Bernales in 1938. Baxter Cox & Leighton also

designed the Windsor Theatre in Nedlands and the Cygnet (Como) in South Perth. Other designs at this time, some being a remodelling in modern style, included the Astor Theatre in Mt Lawley, work at the City of Perth featuring the Royal and Ambassadors Theatres in central Hay Street, the Grand Theatre in Murray Street (all now demolished); Fremantle's Princess Theatre and the Lyric in Bunbury.



Baxter Cox & Leighton designed 'Coronel' - six flats on the corner of Clark Street and Fairway in Nedlands, now the UWA Clark Street Apartments (*The West Australian*, 2 October 1937, p.4)



Baxter Cox & Leighton 1938 Department of Agriculture at UWA - north and east elevations (John Taylor 2019; see 'Crawley Campus', p.51 for drawing).

The highlight of the practice's design work in this busy period was the Metro Theatre in William Street, demolished for construction of offices in the early 1970s. The last pre-war theatre commission was the refurbishment of the Plaza Theatre in central Hay Street. By mutual consent, the Baxter Cox - Leighton partnership was dissolved on 11 November 1939, and both men took up service in the Second World War (1939-1945). With the movement of the Royal Institute of Architects of WA (where he was a Councillor and Fellow) into a national body, Cox's professional qualities were acknowledged by the conferring of the title Fellow of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects in 1943.



The remodelled State Theatre, shops and picture garden at the corner of Walcott and Beaufort streets, Mt. Lawley, which will be reopened in about two weeks. The architects are Messrs. Baxter-Cox and Leighton.

1939 State Theatre corner Walcott & Beaufort Streets Mount Lawley, now the Astor Theatre  
(*The West Australian*, 29 April 1939, p.4).

Following the outbreak of war in September 1939, Baxter Cox was appointed to Land Headquarters in April 1940, and enlisted in the Second Australian Imperial Force during May 1940. Shortly afterwards he was posted to the 2/16<sup>th</sup> Battalion and given responsibility for raising the battalion. He remained in command of the battalion during its deployment to the Middle East before being promoted to temporary brigadier and taking over command of the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade in March 1941. He remained in command of the brigade until June 1941. Cox returned to Australia in 1942, after which he undertook a variety of positions on the staff of Army Headquarters – including deployments at Townsville and in New Guinea. While on active service his residence with Ivy was listed as Lawson Flats, on The Esplanade at Perth. While holding the rank of temporary brigadier, Baxter-Cox was invested as a Commander of the Order of the British Empire on 14 June 1945. He was discharged in August of 1946.

A move to Victoria at the end of the war saw Derf and Ivy's residence change to The Basin, Fern Tree Gully, Dandenong with the occupation of orchardist. This was still their address in 1949. Cox appears to have moved back to architectural pursuits in the later 1940s, and an appointment to the Victorian Housing Commission was announced in February 1948. At fifty years of age, Brigadier A.R. Baxter Cox was elected as a Fellow of the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects in 1948. In June 1950, Cox was advertising seeking architectural draftsmen, with his office located at 403 Post Office Place Melbourne.



During the early 1950s, Cox was involved in a number of post-war housing schemes, one for Railways Department 'kit homes' at Sunshine (in the west of Melbourne), which were hoped could be assembled at the rate of at least eighty per month. The homes were designed in Melbourne by Baxter Cox & Associates in conjunction with Yuncken, Freeman Bros, Griffiths & Simpson. In 1953 he was appointed as architect to the Salvation Army, Victoria Property Trust, the Bethany Eventide Home, Box Hill Citadel and other projects.

Cox also undertook single domestic commissions, including a two-storey residence at Stawell Street in Kew for R. Wallace Mitchell. In 1954 Derf was again advertising for a drafter, noting the position was suitable for residents in the Box Hill – Fern Tree Gully area, suggesting his office had been moved out of the city and closer to home. He was again involved with a 'pre-cut' mass housing development at Eildon, north-east of Melbourne in 1954.

With his career in WA effectively halted when he was just forty years of age, Cox has been largely forgotten in the architectural history of the State, yet he was one the first locally born and trained architects, and he produced a significant number of important projects in conjunction with his father, with Reg Summerhayes, with Bill Leighton, and in his own right. One of a number of WA architects whose lives were severely affected by the impacts of not just one, but two World Wars, the distinguished architect-soldier A.R. Baxter Cox CBE died 18 October 1958 in the district of Thebarton, Victoria, aged 60 years. Ivy survived him, passing away in 1969 at the age of 74 years. The couple did not have children.

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