Dulcie Duncan – in white – with her family at 14 Regent Street Mount Lawley in 1933 (Xmas Card Essay 2002); the residence retains the distinctive front archway in 2026 (Google).

Duncan Courtney Martin Richards (1934-2026) was born 27 May 1934 at 14 Regent Street Mount Lawley, his maternal grandparents' residence, a son to Arthur Courtney and Dulcie Alma Richards. From Cornwall, England, Arthur Richards was the Government Printer of Ceylon (Sri Lanka), and the couple had been married at St Michael's Church, Polwatte, Colombo in August 1933. Born at Dwellingup in 1913 to Andrew and Elizabeth Duncan, Dulcie Duncan had departed Fremantle with her mother on the *Orontes* for a holiday trip to Ceylon in November 1932, and the trip may have been when she met her future husband, as they were engaged by March of 1933. Dulcie returned to Perth in February 1934 to prepare to have Duncan, and they commuted across the Indian Ocean over time. Duncan attended Guildford Grammar School from 1943, completing his Leaving Certificate in 1952, with a distinction in mathematics.

Duncan entered the relatively new School of Architecture course at Perth Technical College (PTC) in 1953 under the directorship of William (Bill) H. Robertson (1905-1953). Robertson had assisted to launch the inaugural program at PTC in post-war 1946. The close-knit Perth architectural community was shocked when he died in March 1953, aged just 48 years. The course then came under the directorship of Francis 'Senior' Bolland from mid-1954. Bolland applied a more definite emphasis on design in course teaching than his predecessor.

Richards commenced first-year studies at PTC with thirteen students, a number of whom would in the future become registered architects in WA: Gordon Allan (reg no 420), Ron Bodycoat (434), Kin Ho (361), Walter Hunter (342), Bill Phillips (320), Doug Stuart (313), and George Winning (335). The sole female student in the first-year class of 1953, Oline Hall, would go on to enjoy a significant career in landscape architecture and as a heritage consultant; and as we shall see, a life-long partnership with Duncan.

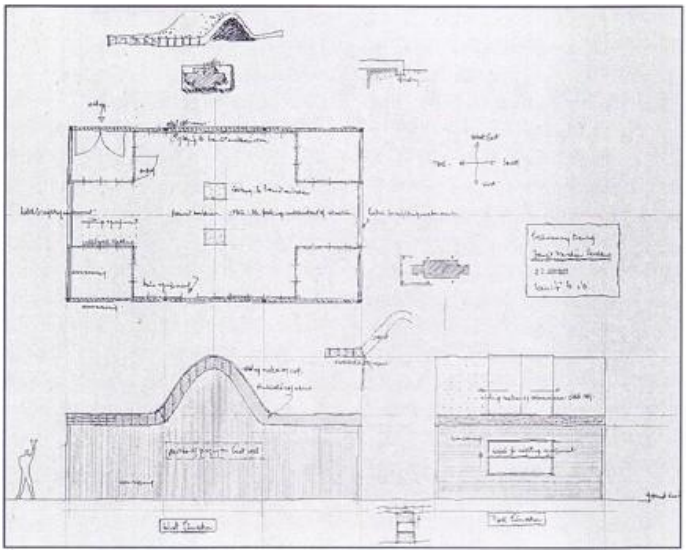
Richards soon demonstrated his academic skills, and in 1954 won the W.G. Bennett Prize (for the 'greatest all-round progress from commencement of training until the beginning of practical experience'), and as an indicator of future interests, the Margaret Pitt Morison History Essay Prize. It appears that Duncan enjoyed the usual relaxations with fellow students, and *The Architect* periodical of June 1955 noted that he 'celebrated his 21st with a riotous party in the hills'. We are fortunate that Duncan wrote prolifically in later years, providing great insights into his architectural studies and career. In a 2006 essay titled: *Walking in Memphis: Youthful Journeys to Melbourne*, he recounts:

In 1954, as a twenty-year-old, I first visited Melbourne in the company of two fellow architectural students. [*The Architect* of March 1955 notes the others as Ron Bodycoat and Bill (sic Walter) Hunter] *It was at the end of our second year at the Department of Architecture, Perth Technical College and the end of our full-time education. In the future we would work in an architect's office with one day a week at the Department as well as evening classes. I bought an Olivetti Lettera 22 portable typewriter (purely as an objet d'art) to celebrate the occasion, but it wasn't enough. It seemed more logical to mark this rite of passage to a professional world by taking a trip. …*

Back in Perth I applied for a job with Eric Leach but was rejected and then, out of the blue, was kidnapped by the firm of F.G.B. Hawkins & Desmond Sands. It sounds dramatic, but it was true. Desmond Sands asked Senior Bolland to recommend a student for his office and he suggested I would do well. Sands called me to his office for an interview, told me I was going to work in his firm, that it would be hard work, that I wouldn't get paid much and that the experience would be good for me. He was right in every case, but not straight away. My first months of professional life were spent on the roof of the St Georges Terrace office doing sun prints. …

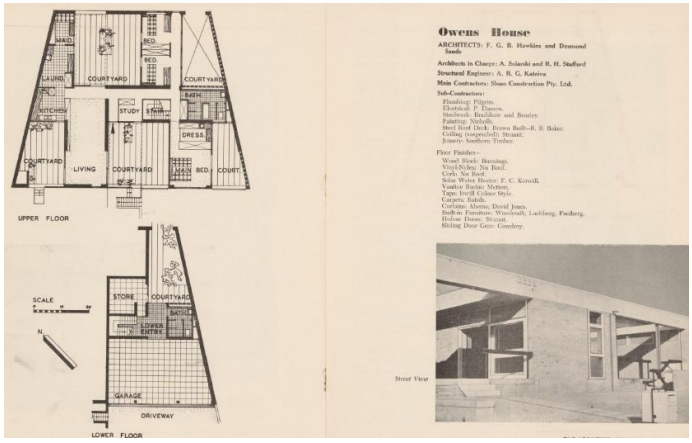
In 1957 I undertook a written thesis, a Mumfordian prose poem in praise of the Australian city, to complete my architectural course. Like many ambitious (or over ambitious) projects it was an ever-growing monster that could not be contained, or completed in time, so I decided to extend my course into 1958 in order to do something worthwhile. Then, quite unexpectedly, in early 1958 Bolland resigned and almost immediately left for South Africa. The only planner

on the staff, Bolland was alone in his sympathy for my project. Faced with this looming predicament I decided to write off six month's work and obtained approval to proceed with a more traditional design topic. Antoni Solarski, a part-time staff member, mentor and friend was appointed as my tutor. …



Observatory, Transit Meridian Building, Thesis Project of 1958 (Visions and Voices, 1996, p.16).

I resigned from F.G.B. Hawkins & Desmond Sands and working long hours completed the thesis in several weeks. My years in the office had been rewarding, but it was time to move on. Most recently I had documented the Kellerberrin Railway Station (not built), a concrete vaulted structure designed by Peter Parkinson, a brick and tile church at Wyalkatchem, designed by Antoni Solarski, and I had designed the Owens House. I even acted as site architect for a hideous brick warehouse. Now I had some experience and a folio of work to show.



Owens House at Carnarvon Crescent, Coolbinia (*The Architect*, December 1958, pp.36-7; see Xmas Card Essay 2002 for Duncan's notes on his design of the residence).

So in mid-1958, free of an architectural school at last, I bought a Vespa scooter (another iconic design object but more useful than the Lettera 22) and headed for Victoria. Not all the way, of course, I took the train to Port Pirie and then set off for Melbourne, this time on my own. However, two good friends had moved to Melbourne from Perth earlier in the year and I planned to visit them first. …

Duncan Richards on a Vespa scooter (Xmas Card Essay 2007).

I decided to obtain employment in my favourite firms. Nothing wrong with that, but I had no intention to remain, only to taste the flavour of the office and leave. I got a job with BSM [Bates Smart McCutcheon] *and Grounds, Romberg & Boyd and stayed a very short time in both cases. In retrospect I can only say that both offices more than met my expectations. BSM, then in their new glass-box office on St Kilda Road, was a big machine of an office, but an exciting place in which to work. … Grounds, Romberg & Boyd was something special. I was assigned to a team Roy Grounds was assembling to undertake a new project, but cannot recall the project. I have one memory of the occasion. Grounds spoke about the task and I ventured to ask a question. He did not like being interrupted and told me 'I was to listen not talk. If questions were to be asked, he would ask them.'*

Quickly the end of the year arrived and it was necessary to return to Perth to graduate and register as an architect. Some friends and I had already arranged to leave for Europe in mid-1959 for a working holiday so there was much to do. I left Perth with no plans to return, but we all know about John Lennon and plans.

The Architect of December 1957 noted that those who completed the Fifth Year of the PTC course that year included: Gordon Allan, David Krantz, Bob Stafford and Doug Stuart. Another highly talented student in Richard's year group, Stuart had obtained the best results of those completing their studies, but it was noted that Duncan Richards was the only student who achieved two distinctions.

Wallace Greenham, Duncan Richards, and Brian Kidd at the1958 Prize Night at PTC. Richards received £800 for the Morawetz Prize (*The West Australian*, 12 December 1958, p.22).

In December 1958 Wally Greenham (1927-2017) and Brian Kidd (1936-2017) gained £150 each as runners-up in the lucrative Morawetz Travel Prize, with the £800 first prize taken by Richards. A Reserve Bank of Australia calculator notes that £800 in 1956 would have been worth around $30 000 in 2026. Duncan achieved registration with the Architects Board of Western Australia (reg no 329) in June 1959. He then used the Morawetz Prize money for travel to Europe from mid-1959 – briefly described in email correspondence of 2025:

'A group of 4 of us (Doug Stuart, his wife, Norma, Ron Bodycoat and myself) left Perth by ship disembarking on a Greek island and then by bus and ferry to Italy and to the Vespa HQ to pick up off-the-line machines. Then it was a typical GRAND TOUR before arriving in the UK. We leased the upper floor of a large house in Highgate, near to Karl Marx. [Marx tomb, Highgate Cemetery, London].

There was working in some cases, but we all took the opportunity to study British architecture and engineering, old and new. A rewarding experience when together and on our own. We also tried our hand at a few competitions with no success. The really big one was Liverpool Cathedral; we did not get it done in time. It was all a long time ago, but the interesting thing is we all came home. …

When I think about it now, I believe a trip to LA would have been more future oriented for me and more profitable. Who knows! But then I had distant family that I could meet in London, however I never got to see them.'

After returning from overseas travel in 1960, Duncan worked in North Sydney for architects Ancher Mortlock & Murray for a time, before being attracted back to Perth to work on a fantastic (or notorious) 'Key West' project for the South Perth foreshore. He described it as a 'big project that was going to establish the national and international reputation of F.G.B. Hawkins & Desmond Sands, but which came to nothing'.

Duncan Richards and Oline Hall were married at Perth in 1961, and ABWA records note that in 1963 were living at 24 Hawkestone Street Cottesloe. Oline had been born in Sydney in 1935, and subsequently moved with her family to Perth, where she completed her secondary education. By 1960 Oline's interests had moved to landscape architecture and for the next two years she worked in the nascent Landscape Section of the Public Works Department headed by renowned landscape architect John Oldham (1907–1999).

It was Senior Bolland who first introduced Duncan to teaching at PTC in 1958. He offered a short-term position while Margaret Pitt Morison was away on leave. But it was Clarence Bunn, the next head of Department, who offered Richards full-time teaching on the strength of lectures he gave to students discussing what had been seen on the 1959-1960 travels in Europe and the United Kingdom. Duncan commenced as a Lecturer in Architecture on 12 February 1962, at a salary of £1 594, which he though was a lot of money at the time!

Leonie Matthews, a long-term colleague and close friend of the Richards wrote in 2014: *During 1964 they moved to the bushland setting of Darlington in the Perth Hills, a place associated with some of Western Australia's best-known artists and writers. With their two young children, Helen and Angus, and Duncan's maternal grandfather Andrew Duncan, they moved in 1969 to their newly constructed house in Constance Street, Darlington. The house consisted of two lightweight steel-framed pavilions and the design was an important part of the Richards' exploration of ways of living. In 1976 Oline wrote (in text accompanying presentation drawings of 'House for an intersection in the Hills environment') of the way that they had imagined the house as 'a workshop for living'. It was, she noted: 'A modest, habitable place, inconspicuous in its visible form, expansive in its life aspirations; integrated with the environment & unassertive in the wider community order.'*

Early days of construction at the Constance Street Darlington House c.1966 (Duncan Richards).

The Darling Range, also known as the Darling Scarp, is a low escarpment running north-south just east of the Perth metropolitan area, and is often referred to locally as the Perth Hills. From early days, architects had produced many striking buildings in the hills, and in the 1960s an emerging group of young practitioners developed somewhat radical 'organic' designs, with an empathy for the natural environment. Key residences were produced by Wally Greenham, Bill Kierath, Gene Mapp, Ken Waldron; and by the Richards with their Constance Street home. Self-built and first occupied at Easter 1969 as a not-quite-complete house, it was the fourth scheme by Oline and Duncan for land they had purchased back in 1963.

Duncan wrote an unpublished essay on the Constance Street house in 2025, noting: *To sum up the Constance Street house could be seen as a rather primitive steel shed structure, an experiment, but during much of the year to live within it was an exquisite environmental experience in what was truly an open house, basically a verandah. Winter was another story!* The building was demolished in early 1986, when the Richards decided to move nearer to Perth.

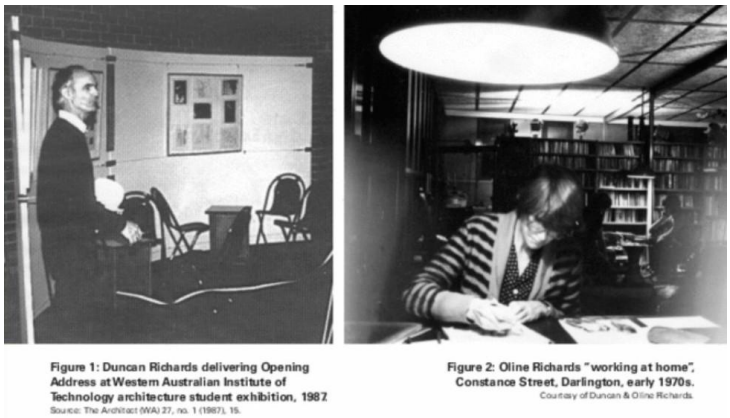


Figure 1: Duncan Richards delivering Opening Address at Western Australian Institute of Technology architecture student exhibition, 1967
Source: The Architect (WA) 27, no. 1 (1987), 15.

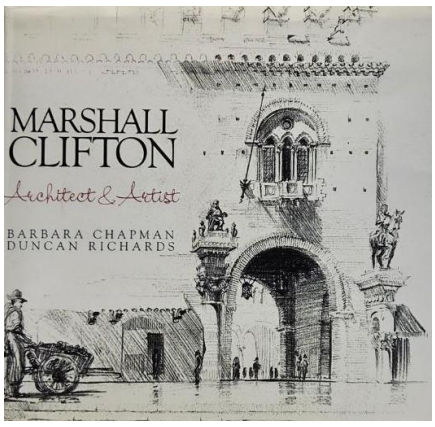
Figure 2: Oline Richards "working at home", Constance Street, Darlington, early 1970s.
Courtesy of Duncan & Oline Richards.

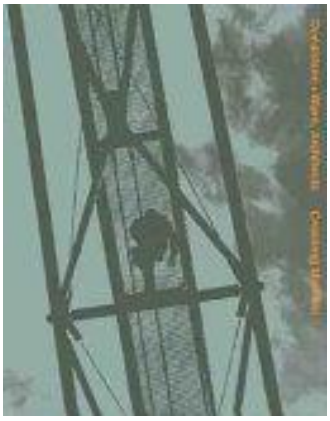
Duncan and Oline Richards at work (Leonie Matthews, 'Parochial Matters', 2008, p.24).

In 1976 Duncan enrolled at Murdoch University to study for a Bachelor of Arts degree in history. Both he and Oline developed an extensive back-list of historical reports, publications, letters etc that has been curated and published online by Leonie Mattthews. Leonie noted of the Richards prolific works in 2008:

'Among the many studies they undertook are two projects completed collaboratively in the early 1980s. The first of these was *Historic Gardens Study (WA)* (1980) commissioned by the National Trust of Australia (WA) as part of a national study initiated by the Australian Heritage Commission that aimed to focus attention on gardens as items of the National Estate and to create awareness of the need for protection and conservation of historic gardens. The Richards completed a further study in 1983 for the National Trust of Australia (WA), *Gardens and Trees in the Kimberley: A Survey of Historic Places, Gardens and Trees*. Their writings feature no collaborative works after this; however, through their shared commitment to local history and a mutual respect for their two disciplines they continually supported and encouraged each other's writing.'

Duncan's teaching and research focussed on twentieth century Western Australian architecture and urban history. Oline practiced as a landscape architect and professional historian. She collaborated with Duncan in their practice, Duncan Richards and Oline Richards: Design Consultants, from the early 1960s to the mid-1980s before establishing her own practice as a Heritage Consultant specialising in Western Australian designed landscapes.

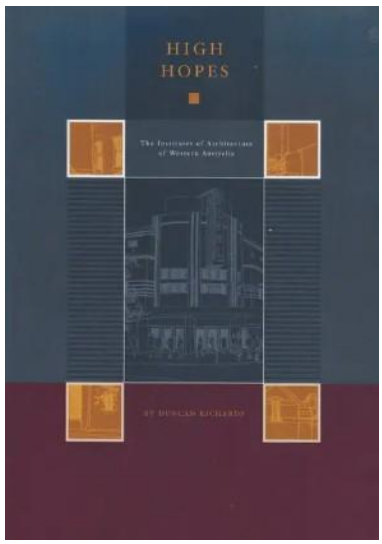




Books co-authored by Duncan Richards: 1989 'Marshall Clifton - Architect and Artist' with Barbara Chapman; and 2000 'Donaldson + Warn : crossing midfield' with Geoffrey London.

Despite his obvious architectural design talent, Duncan is best-known as an educator, researcher, and writer, rather than a practitioner. For thirty-two and a

half years he taught architecture: from February 1962 at PTC, subsequently when PTC morphed into the Western Australian Institute of Technology (WAIT) in 1967, and then when WAIT became Curtin University in 1987, until retiring in July 1994. He was an inspiring teacher, who shared his wealth of knowledge. From 1994-1999 he held an Honorary Research Fellow position at the University of Western Australia. As a researcher, Duncan was a passionate advocate for WA architectural history, and the completion in 2003 of *High Hopes - A history of the Institutes of Architecture in Western Australia* provided a landmark publication, written in his exceptional conversational style.



Meino Mirkva (RAIA WA State Manager), Duncan Richards, Doug Sheppard (Douglas George Publications - typesetters), and Oline Richards at the launch of the book 'High Hopes - A history of the Institutes of Architecture in Western Australia', 3 April 2003 at the RAIA WA office in the QV1 building (*The Architect*, vol.2, Winter 2003, p.6).

After many years living in Perth and dedicating much of their time to the history and heritage of Western Australia's built environment, Oline and Duncan Richards moved to Sydney in 2007 to be closer to family. He continued to correspond with past students and colleagues with his customary generosity and clarity of thought. In this new phase of their life, the Richards continued their reading and writing, residing at Ballina through Duncan's final years.

Duncan Courtney Martin Richards died in February 2026, survived by Oline, Helen and Angus. Duncan's professional qualities were acknowledged by the conferring of the honorific titles Associate of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects (RAIA) in 1959, Fellow of the RAIA in 1974, Life Fellow of the RAIA in the 2000s, and in special recognition, an Honorary Fellow in 2024.

Duncan was an important architectural historian and ‘student’ of Western Australian architecture. He contributed regularly to architectural journals and his writings form an important record of local architectural endeavours. He was an inspirational teacher, he encouraged his students to experience and appreciate the work of Western Australian architects, and organized exhibitions to celebrate local architecture.

Duncan and Oline Richards (AIA WA E-Newsletter 4 March 2026, Leonie Matthews)

Thus, Duncan Richards holds an esteemed place in the teaching of architecture and in the documentation of WA architectural history. With Oline, the couple are held dear to Western Australian architects of the Twentieth Century, their partnership residing with that of John and Ray Oldham as significant recorders and storytellers of our place.

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Pers. comms. Duncan and Oline Richards 2006-2025, Leonie Matthews 2025-2026.

Pers. comm. Melissa Short, archivist Guildford Grammar School 2026.

Heritage Committee review: 20 August 2026 Last updated: 1 October 2026

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