

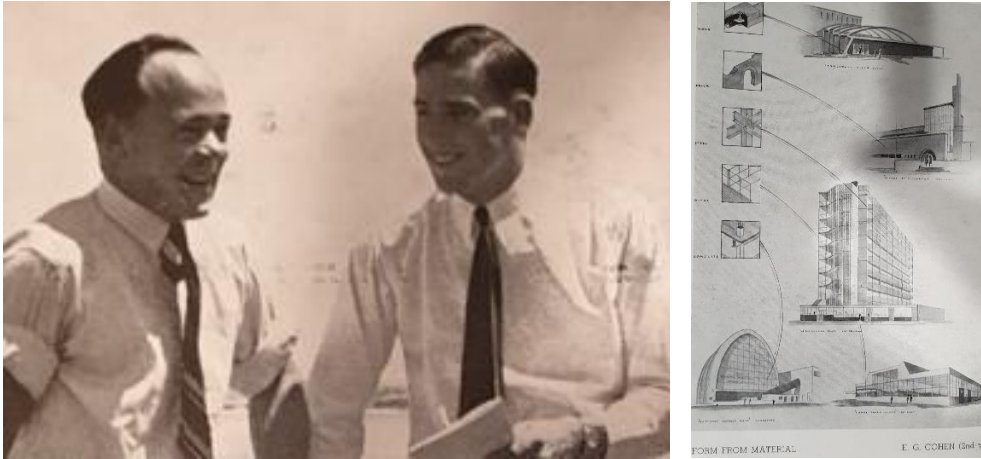
Gres Cohen (*Architecture Australia*, July-Aug 2008, p.62)

**Eustace Gresley Cohen** (1926-2008) was born 22 March 1926 in South Perth, son of Eustace Gresley (1881-1938) and Maude (nee Brazier 1896-1947) Cohen, who had married at Donnybrook in 1922. His father 'Eusty', a prominent architect, died suddenly in January 1938, when 'Gres' was just eleven years old. Gres studied at Hale School, at that time located in West Perth. As soon as he turned eighteen years old in 1944, he enlisted for Second World War (1939-1945) service in the Royal Australian Navy, was initially posted for training at *Cerberus* in Victoria, and was fortunate to be discharged in 1945 without coming under fire.



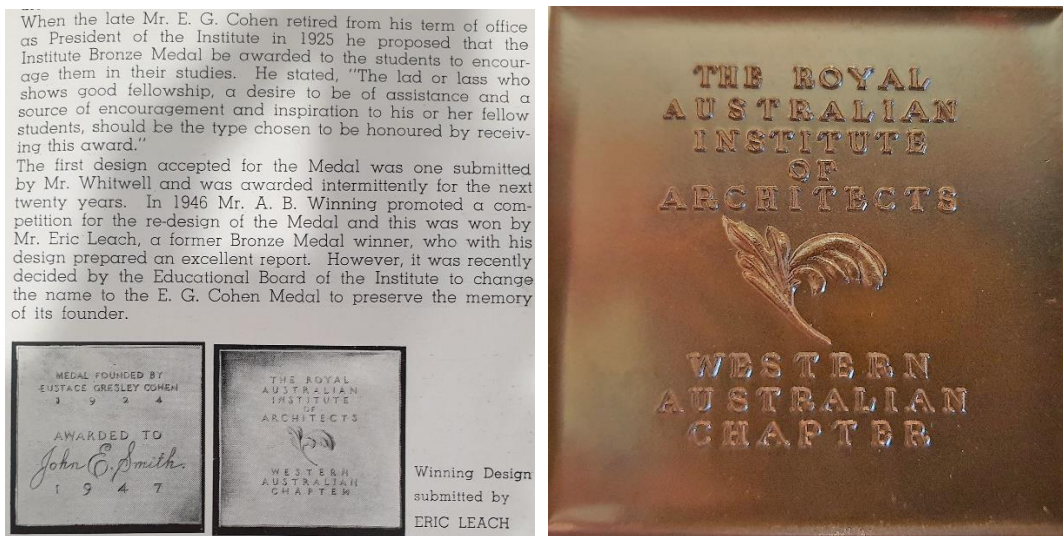
Royal Perth Golf Club team which defeated Cottesloe in a 1946 Pennant Final, from left to right: L. Harke, R. Blatchford, John Cohen, H.B. Morris (captain), Gres Cohen, R. Cargeeg, J. Banting (*Western Mail*, 29 August 1946, p.23).

Post-war Gres entered the School of Architecture at Perth Technical College (PTC) under the directorship of William (Bill) H. Robertson (1905-1953). Robertson had assisted to launch the architectural course at PTC in 1946. Gres had lost both his parents by the time he was twenty-one years old – as Maude died in August 1947 at South Perth aged just 52 years, but happier times followed when his sister Helen (b.1923) was married in 1948. Gres was best man when his brother John (b.1927) married at St Mary's Church in West Perth during April 1950. Gres soon married Enid Catherine Parry (b.1923, daughter of former Surveyor General T.S. Parry) at the same church in May 1950, with architect David Moreton Berkeley (Bill) Fitzhardinge (1920-1996) acting as his best man.



Sub-editor A.J. Shepherd (at left) and editor E.G. Cohen (at right) of the Architectural Students Association magazine *Phi*; and a 1949 drawing of Gres' (*Phi*, Feb 1950, pp.8, 26).

Gres was active in student circles at PTC, and in 1952 he won the E.G. Cohen Medal, an annual award initiated by his father in 1925, recognizing the WA architectural student distinguished by their work and showing a spirit of unselfishness and cooperation in relationships with fellow students.



E.G. Cohen Medal, first awarded in 1925, won by Gres Cohen in 1952 (*Phi*, Feb 1950, p.18; John Taylor).

Cohen completed his architectural studies in 1952 within a soon-to-be-influential class that included Alex Doepel, John Duncan, Morrie Fairbrother, Jack Finney, John Lidbury, Eddie McMillan, Leslie Moon, Colin Nicholas, Dennis Silver, Bill Waters and John White. Gres' exam results were published in *The West Australian* and he registered with the Architects Board of Western Australia (ABWA reg no 244) during December 1952. The close-knit graduate group were shocked when Bill Robertson died in March 1953, aged just 48 years.



Gres Cohen, John Lidbury and skipper Eric Leach – all architects, and crew of *Aries*, winner of a Swan River invitation race for the Thera Shield (*The West Australian*, 23 March 1953, p.23).

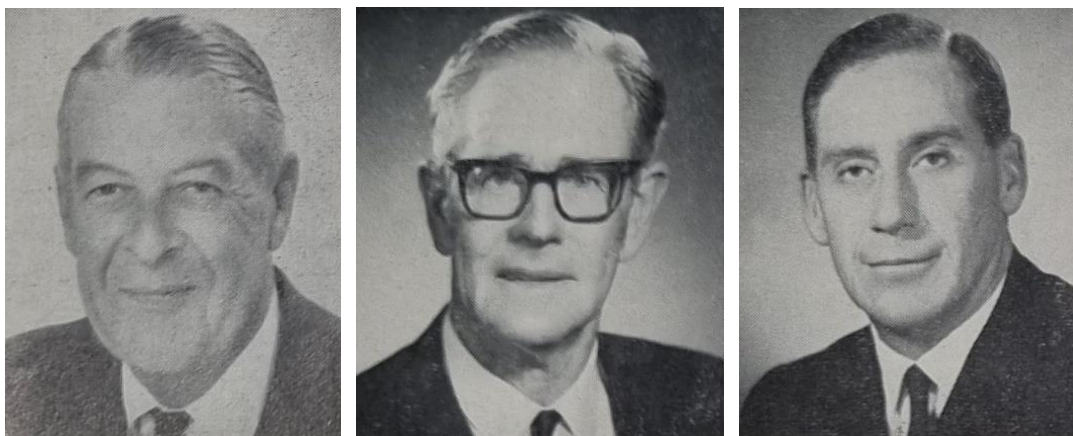
The architectural practices Hobbs Forbes & Partners and Eales Cohen & Fitzhardinge had developed post-war into Forbes & Fitzhardinge led by H.T. (Bill) Forbes (1904 -1975) and John Berkeley Fitzhardinge (1911-2008). It is of interest that both Bill Forbes and John Fitzhardinge became brothers-in-law, marrying Gres' aunts – younger sisters of Maude Cohen, respectively Phyllis Brazier (b.1908) and Gwendolyn Brazier (b.1911). As a young student, it was logical that Gres Cohen would in 1950 join the practice that had developed from one founded in 1913 by his father with J.H. Eales (1864-1957), a firm that had continued with strong family connections! Successful in the growing post-war economic recovery of the 1950s, to assist with housing the thriving practice in 1954 'Forbes & Fitz' added a fifth floor to the top of their St George's Terrace Perth offices in the WA Trustees Building.

In the 1950s and 60s Forbes & Fitzhardinge grew with the development of WA, retaining earlier clients who had deferred building due to previous restrictions on materials and available funds. As the State's industrial base grew, the firm designed plants for Vickers Hoskins, Brisbane & Wunderlich, Bell Bros, Union Maltings and the BP Kwinana oil refinery. Plants followed these for BHP and Alcoa. They experienced growth in office buildings, retail stores, hospitals and aged care. In 1954 one of John Fitzhardinge's brothers Bill Fitzhardinge (best man at Gres' wedding in 1950) and William Milton Barton (1913-2006) were admitted to the Forbes & Fitz partnership. Gres Cohen became a partner in 1959. J.A.G. (Tony) Brand joined in 1964, and in later years Michael Berkeley Fitzhardinge (1939-1999), a son of John Fitzhardinge's brother Roger, became a partner in the firm.



T & G Building of 1961 at 37 Barrack Street, Perth (SLWA 114950PD, 004143PD)

The firm was responsible for one of Perth's earlier high rise buildings, the 14 storey T&G building of 1961, on the south-west corner of Barrack Street and St George's Terrace. With city planning regulations ensuring that prime Perth properties were more valuable when heavily developed, the T&G was one of many 1960s and 70s office towers for banks and insurance companies in St George's Terrace, a good number designed by Forbes & Fitzhardinge. Unfortunately the people of Perth at this time held little understanding of the value of their forebears' quality Federation-era designs, unfashionable at the time, and the T&G building replaced a landmark Talbot Hobbs design of 1897.



F & F partners Bill Forbes, John Fitzhardinge and Gres Cohen (*The Architect*, June 1966, p.30).

The T&G was followed by high rise buildings for the ANZ Bank at 84 St Georges Terrace, and the Prudential Building on the south-west corner of Howard Street and St George's Terrace, replacing Dean Smith's 1903 *Surrey Chambers*. A client retained from earlier years was the Salvation Army, and in the early 1960s Forbes & Fitz designed for them one of the earlier multi-storey residential complexes in Perth, the Railton Temperance Hotel. Further office buildings included the AMP and Westpac towers in the Perth CBD.



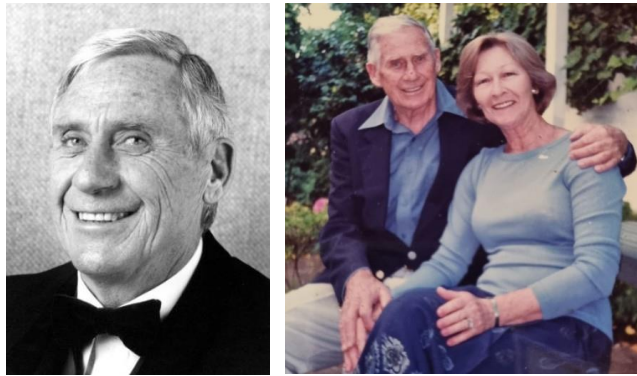
ANZ Bank Building 84 St Georges Terrace, Perth (SLWA 342623PD)

Gres's natural leadership qualities were recognized by his peers and this encouraged him to serve his professional body, the Royal Australian Institute of Architects (RAIA). At the regional level, Gres accepted numerous responsibilities on behalf of the architectural profession. For example, on return from an overseas trip in 1968 he was instrumental in the promotion and formation of a Bonus Plot Ratio Committee of the Perth City Council, whereby developers providing public open spaces and arcades and conserving heritage buildings could obtain plot ratio bonuses in exchange. For these services he was awarded the Helen Dance Medal for Civic Improvement from the City of Perth.

He served as a RAIA WA Chapter Councillor from 1968, WA Chapter President 1971-1972, National Councillor 1971-1979, and National President 1977-1978 – just the third West Australian to do so following Ken Duncan 1959-1960 and Mervyn Parry 1966-1967. In these roles he was able to exert considerable influence for the better in national architectural professional affairs. One of these projects was the putting together of a team of architects to produce and promulgate a 'first-ever' guide specification for Australia-wide application. He became deeply involved with the Master Builders Federation of Australia and the

Building Owners and Managers Association in the development of commonly acceptable contracts for subsequent use by the Australian building and development industry. Gres was awarded Life Fellowship of the RAIA in 1977.

As a component of his numerous extracurricular activities, in 1981 Gres was an active member of the Employee Relations Committee of the WA Chamber of Commerce, becoming that body's chairman in 1982. He 'moved-on' from Forbes & Fitz in 1985, working with another ex-principal Lindsay Waller (c.1929- 2020) for a period. Forbes & Fitz produced a large share of Western Australia's finest buildings up until the 1990s, then evolving into Forbes & Fitzhardinge Woodland. Partner Steve Woodland married one of Michael Fitzhardinge's daughters, but the previous names finally disappeared in a merger as the company name changed to Cox Howlett & Bailey Woodland.



Gres Cohen in later years, and with Shirley (RAIA WA; [www.cohenconnect.org](http://www.cohenconnect.org))

Inheriting his father's great love of the game, Gres was a single-digit handicap golfer at Royal Perth; he was also a keen tennis player at Dalkeith Tennis Club, and a yachtsman dedicated to the Royal Perth Yacht Club. He was a club champion billiard player, particularly at his downtown recreational venue, the Weld Club. Supported through Alzheimer's disease by his second wife Shirley (married 1968) in later years, Gres Cohen died 20 March 2008 at Dalkeith aged 81 years. He had two children Jen and Ric with Enid, and with Shirley another son Philip who is also an architect successful in private practice in WA. Following Gres' passing, RAIA CEO 1974-1991 Don Bailey recollected: *On a personal note, those who associated with Gres Cohen over time in business and recreational pursuits came to know and respect him as a man who was indeed "larger than life" – who was always courteous, with a ready and endearing smile. Everyone privileged to know him was always at ease and reassured in his company.*

References:

- 'Obituary: The Late Mr Eustace Cohen', *Building and Construction*, 21 January 1938, p.8.
- 'Perth Architect Mr Eustace Cohen Dead', *The West Australian*, 21 January 1938, p.11.
- 'A history of golf in Western Australia by Eustace Cohen', by instalments in *The Western Mail*, eg 'eighth instalment by the Late Eustace Cohen' 19 May 1938, p.15.
- NAA: A6770, COHEN E G, COHEN EUSTACE GRESLEY : Service Number - F5303 : DOB 22 Mar 1926 : POB SOUTH PERTH WA : POE FREMANTLE WA : NOK COHEN MAUDE
- 'Deaths', *The West Australian*, 29 August 1947, p.1 (Maude Cohen of 20 Karoo St South Perth).
- 'Mrs M. Cohen', *The West Australian*, 6 September 1947, p.15 (leading A.C.F. worker in war).
- 'Top Secret Wedding', *Western Mail*, 26 February 1948, p.32 (Helen Cohen engaged John Rowe).
- 'People and Parties', *The West Australian*, 20 April 1950, p.19 (John Cohen married).
- 'Weekend Weddings and Parties', *The West Australian*, 8 May 1950, p.21 (Gres Cohen married).
- 'President's Message', *Chapter News*, RAIA WA, May 1977, no.198 (background info for Gres).
- 'The President Reports', *Architecture Australia*, April-May 1978, pp.25-26.
- Pers. comm. Shirley Cohen of 27 Leon Road Dalkeith, 29 March 2007.
- 'Vale Gresley Cohen, 1926–2008', Don Bailey, *Architecture Australia*, July 2008.
- 'Collection of architectural plans of public buildings and private residences in Perth, Fremantle and various country towns', Forbes & Fitzhardinge, 1880-[1976], Battye Library CN 83; see also drawings donated by David Hodge, formerly of Forbes & Fitzhardinge, at 'Hobbs Smith & Forbes', Battye Library MN2402, ACC 6403A.

Heritage Committee review: 18 April 2024 Last updated: 18 April 2024

**Citation details:**

Taylor, Dr John J., 'Eustace Gresley Cohen (1926-2008)', Western Australian Architect Biographies, <http://www.taylorarchitects.com.au/Biographies.html> accessed DATE.