

PRIZE FOR YOUNG ARCHITECT



Mr. E. J. Whitaker, an architecture student at the Perth Technical College, receives congratulations from Miss V. J. Wright, the only woman student on the course, after he had been presented with technical books worth £10/10/-, a prize for being the student to show greatest progress throughout his training. The prize was presented to him yesterday afternoon by the Director of Education (Mr. Murray Little).



Ed Whitaker receiving the W.G. Bennett prize of 1949, at twenty-one years of age (*The West Australian*, 16 September 1949, p.17; Ed in PTC group at the event (courtesy Claire Whitaker).

**Edwin James Whitaker** (1928-2013) was born 4 February 1928, the fourth son to Richard and Lilian Blanche (nee Chambers) Whitaker of Battle Street in Cottesloe. Arriving at Western Australia from Yorkshire in 1910, Richard became a draftsman and then building supervisor with the Public Works Department of WA, initially working in Kalgoorlie, where he met Lilian. Richard served during the First World War (1914-1918), and eldest son Richard Robert (Bob), was born at Geraldton in 1918. After the War the family moved to Albany, where John and Alfred were born in 1920 and 1924, respectively. They returned to Perth, where 'Ed' (1928) and his sister Alice (1934) were born.

Ed Whitaker attended Christ Church Grammar School, and then elected to study architecture at the newly-founded (1946) course at Perth Technical College (PTC). Initially offered as a six-year diploma consisting of three years full-time and three years part-time in conjunction with work within a practice, by the time the first graduates registered as architects in 1951 the qualification had changed to an Associateship in Architecture. Prior to the PTC course,

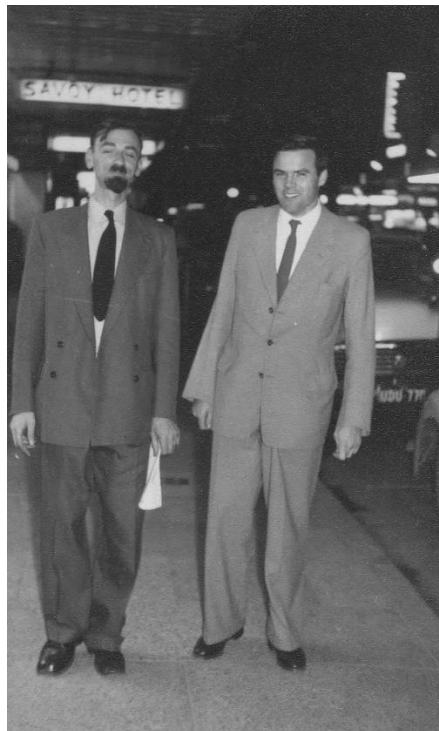
architects in WA were trained as indentured students within an architectural practice. They could, however, attend outside classes. In 1949 Ed Whitaker won the W.G. Bennett prize of £10/10/ worth of technical books 'for the student who had shown the greatest all-round progress from the commencement of training until the beginning of his practical experience'.

The twenty-three year old Whitaker was one of just three individuals who completed the fifth year of the architecture course at PTC in 1951, along with older Second World War (1939-1945) service colleagues in Herbert Watson (Bill) Jones (1917-2000) and Ean Lawrence McDonald (1918-2011). Whitaker (no. 230) and McDonald (no.231) both registered with the Architects Board of WA in March 1952, followed by Jones (no.238) in July 1952.

Ed Whitaker worked for architects Powell Cameron & Chisholm (renamed Cameron Chisholm & Nicol from August 1952) before travelling to Cape Town, South Africa, on the *Arawa* in May 1952, leaving from Albany. He then worked with Lightfoot, Twentyman-Jones & Kent in their newly completed building at Cape Town. Ed was considering settling in South Africa but decided not to due to the volatile political and economic situation. He sailed to London in May 1953, again on the *Arawa*. He worked for a short time on the conversion of an old mill into a modern house with an architect named McMullen, who had a studio on his farm just out of Bath. Ed then moved back to London, after securing a job with renowned architect Denis Clarke Hall (1910-2006). Ed was strongly influenced by the style, use of new materials and the importance of efficient function in Denis Clarke Hall's designs.

For a time in London he shared a residence at Earls Court with PTC graduates of 1952 in John White, Ray Leunig, and John Duncan (who also worked for Hall). Then when another architect friend arrived, Stuart Coll, Ed and Stuart travelled together around Europe on motorbikes. Ed was referred to as 'Schwarzbart' in Germany because of his swashbuckling black beard. Ed's parents came to England in 1954 to visit family and friends in Yorkshire, and the three travelled home to Perth together on the *Orontes*, arriving in December 1954. Back in WA, Ed knew he was very compatible with the architectural and business sensibilities of Ean McDonald, and the two men soon formed the firm McDonald Whitaker and Associates.

Ed was also lecturing at PTC through the late 1950s, when Francis Senior Bolland, was head of school. 'Senior' was born in Yorkshire, England, but had also worked in South Africa, coming to WA from Cape Town in 1954. On the reverse of the photo below of the two architects is written: *RAIA AGM here we come! Not really an adequate commemoration of a particularly happy association from 1954-58 – alles van die beste, Ed. Senior.* 'Alles van die beste' means 'all the best' in Afrikaans, and its use surely reflects the fact the two men had picked up some local phrases in their times at Cape Town.



Ed Whitaker (right) with Senior Bolland (left) pictured outside the Savoy Hotel in Perth as they were on their way to a RAIA Annual General Meeting (courtesy Claire Whitaker).

Architects McDonald & Whitaker were successful in the growing WA economy of the 1950s and 1960s. They undertook a variety of commissions. Located in Floreat Park, Hackett Hall was named after a new housing subdivision that was established in the 1950s, this in turn was named after Sir John Winthrop Hackett, prominent citizen and former Chancellor of the University of WA. The hall was designed by McDonald & Whitaker and built for £13 500, providing a community meeting hall for the people of Hackett Estate. Facilities in the hall included a stage and lighting equipment for amateur theatre group productions. During the day the hall was used for a play centre as well as badminton courts. Hackett Hall was officially opened by Dr Buller Murphy, the widow of Sir John Hackett, on 18 June 1960.



Hackett Hall in Draper Street Floreat was opened in 1960 (Google 2020).

Reflecting upon their architectural work in later years, Ean McDonald noted that the practice was developed around Commercial Industrial work wherever possible ... “but like most of us in those days, the net was wide. Apart from the odd Toilet Block, School, Housing Complex, Hospital, Factory, Office, Shopping Centre, Church, Hall, Cathedral, and a couple of Memorials, we tackled whatever came in through the door – gratefully, and confidently.”



Mount Hawthorn Community Centre at 197 Scarborough Beach Road Mt Hawthorn (May 1962 photo by Fritz Kos, SLWA 340,553PD).

During the period 1961-1964, Ed Whitaker was frequently travelling to Geraldton, designing and overseeing the building of the striking Anglican Geraldton Cathedral of the Holy Cross. Ed envisaged the cathedral as an interesting 'horizontal' building 'that could be looked down on from the various vantage look-out points' as well as being 'of bold, dynamic character from the near view'. He believed that 'fine and delicate tracery had no place in the North. The concept for the design of the Cathedral of the Holy Cross resulted from a functional analysis of what went on in the place, with the result that it was based on the Greek amphitheatre, which featured the main performer in the centre and the audience on all sides. For the same reason, the baptismal font is in the centre with a space for congregating around it.'



Holy Cross Cathedral at Geraldton was completed in 1964 (Geraldton Library 756)

PTC architectural student Allan Davies joined McDonald & Whitaker in 1962, and Davies' memoirs provide notice of some of the firms projects at this time: *Architecture was a three year full-time course, followed by two years part time, during which you worked in an office for experience. I was in a hurry to start earning, and after completing the three years, I was pleased to get a job with Ean McDonald and Ed Whitaker. I was just 20, a very young age compared to the graduates who sought work in my office just a few years ago. They threw me in the deep end, and before I had completed my Architectural studies, I was project "Architect" for Harvey Courthouse, and an Anglican Church in Quairading.*



Given Ed Whitaker's work for the Anglican Church at this time, St Faith's Church at Quairading of 1962 is likely to be of his design (20 Nov 2017, SLWA BA2493/1234). The Whitaker family also recall designs for Anglican churches in Three Springs and perhaps Kulin, and the design of the Manse for St Luke's Church, Mosman Park.

As Ean McDonald noted, the firm designed a variety of building types including community centres and halls. The archives collection of the Australian National University has a 1963 new building design at 1100 Hay Street, West Perth by McDonald & Whitaker for the scientific firm H.B. Selby Australia Limited. Illustrating the manner in which McDonald & Whitaker capitalised on the growth of the State in the post-war period, the State Records Office of WA holds files on various government works by the firm in the 1960s and 1970s, including for: 1967 Offices at Three Springs; various projects at schools including in 1968 at Rossmoyne Primary School, 1969 East Coolbellup Primary, 1969 North Beach Primary, 1969 Koongamia Primary, 1969 Rossmoyne Primary, 1969 Marmion Primary, 1970 North Lake (East Coolbellup) Primary, 1970 Darlington Primary, 1970 Hamersley Primary, 1971 Kapinara Primary, 1971 North Beach Primary, 1971 Rossmoyne Primary, 1973 Darlington Primary, 1973 North Lake Primary, 1973 Attadale Primary, 1973 North Beach Primary, 1973 Rossmoyne Primary, 1973 Coolbellup Primary, and in 1974 at Millen Special School.

Gordon Michael White (c1935-2008) joined McDonald & Whitaker as a partner in the practice at a later stage, and George Alexander Winning (1934-) also worked with the firm. In 1965-1974 the practice's registered office was at 17 Ord Street in West Perth, and in 1976 at 7a Ord Street, about the time the joint business split. By 1978, although both architects had offices in West Perth, Ed was sharing an office at 21 Rheola Street with Nancy Lorne Allen (1908-1993), and Ean was at 48 Ord Street.

In the later stages of his career as an architect, Ed Whitaker undertook various projects in the north-west of WA, including a supermarket at Carnarvon, a shopping centre at Karratha for Wesfarmers, and extensions to the Karratha Telephone Exchange. He also designed the police station at Jurien Bay, an x-ray room for the Merredin Hospital, and designed private houses for the Jones in Applecross and the Martins in Kelmscott. As the WA building industry went into depression in the 1970s, many architects turned to other occupations. Ean McDonald opened a sports clothing business, Golden Medal Sportswear, and Ed gradually turned his attention to his Rosa Park vineyard near Margaret River. Following a particularly stressful project, Ed suffered a series of heart attacks and decided to move to Margaret River to recover. He closed his practice in West Perth during 1983, and became a full-time vigneron.

Ed was a member of the Margaret River Grape Growers Association and the committee for the building of the new dam in the 1990s to provide water for the rapidly expanding Margaret River town. He continued to live and work on the Rosa Park property until 1996, when the physical work requirements became too much. After selling the vineyard, he returned with his wife to live in Perth.



Ed Whitaker (at right of middle row) and Helen Whitaker (at right of seated row) at Margaret River Grape Growers Association gathering at Cullens Wines in 1985 (courtesy Claire Whitaker)  
 [For names of all in the photo see <https://www.mosswood.com.au/about/1985-history/>]

Ed Whitaker and Helen Gordon Twine married in 1961, and lived at 29 Johnson Street Peppermint Grove. They had children Claire b.1962, Richard b.1963, and Michael b.1965. Ed had many and various community service engagements, including as President of the Claremont-Cottesloe Rotary Club. He died at Mosman Park on 20 December 2013, aged 85 years, and is memorialised at Karrakatta Cemetery.



Edwin James Whitaker (1928-2013) in later years (courtesy Claire Whitaker).

Whitaker was a member of a relatively small but highly influential group of post Second World War graduates from the fledgling formal architectural education course at PTC. Ed and his contemporaries' work will benefit from greater analysis and documentation in the future. Their built legacy includes many works that will form a generous portion of the cultural heritage of the second half of the Twentieth Century in WA.

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Heritage Committee meeting approval: 17 September 2020 Last updated 17 September 2020

**Citation details:**

Taylor, Dr John J., 'Edwin James Whitaker (1928-2013)', Western Australian Architect Biographies, <http://www.taylorarchitects.com.au/Biographies.html> accessed DATE.