



Hal Menzies circa 1950 (John Menzies)

Harold Bramwell Menzies (1922-2003) was born 1 September 1922 in Campsie, Sydney NSW. 'Hal' was the youngest of five children to parents Alfred Duncan (1874-1947) and Wilhelmina Eliza (nee Marshall, 1878-1968) Menzies, who had married at the Salvation Army Barracks, Albury NSW in 1906. Harold ('Hal') had siblings Elsie b.1907, Alfred (Len) b.1910; Mavis b.1912, and Florence b.1916. The family was very involved in the Salvation Army (SA) community and Hal became proficient in playing the cornet in SA bands and later, the piano.

Following the outbreak of the Second World War (1939-1945), in May of 1942 nineteen-year-old Hal applied to join the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF). At this time, he was employed as an engineering draftsman by A.S. Nicholson Consulting Engineer of 16 Barrack Street Sydney. He had also undergone instruction in the Engineering Diploma Course at Sydney Technical College. Hal was noted as a 'neat and keen draughtsman', and lived at 40 George Street Enfield. Hal had hoped to serve on RAAF aircraft, but due to very poor eyesight he was not successful, and he undertook the 'No. 3 Wireless Assistants Course' at Ultimo in Sydney from September 1942 to December 1942, achieving a 'Distinguished Pass' with a score of 83 per cent. Hal was initially posted to RAAF Rathmines at Lake Macquarie in New South Wales, at one stage the largest RAAF Flying Boat Base in the Southern Hemisphere, and was soon busy with drafting work.

Hal moved to RAAF headquarters at Melbourne in 1943, again as a drafter. He worked with Mandurah-born Rona Leveins Tuckey (1921-2013), also drafting aircraft components and electrical diagrams at the RAAF Signals Drawing Office from 1944. Rona had moved from WA to serve in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF), and the couple were married in April 1945 at Christ Church, Saint Kilda in Melbourne. Hal was discharged from war service in June 1945.



Hal Menzies in Second World War service photos c.1942-1944 (NAA A9301, 65691); Rona Tuckey-Menzies in 1945 (*Sunday Times*, 18 March 1945, p.11, 'Family Notices').

After marriage Hal and Rona moved to Western Australia, and rented in West Perth. Hal joined the WA Public Works Department (PWD) as a draftsman in the architectural division, and in 1946 he joined the Architectural Students' Association (ASA) of WA. In April 1946 they returned briefly to Sydney, where Hal obtained work with Wunderlichs and again with A.S. Nicholson. In July, their son John was born, and the family soon moved back to WA permanently.



Hal and Rona Menzies at a T-Square Ball, probably the 1947 event held at the Embassy Ballroom in Perth – as Hal's fez hat corresponds with newspaper coverage: *A highlight of the evening was an amusing presentation by the male architectural students of an Eastern ballet complete with Sultan, slave girls and a camel.*; School at 48 Macpherson Street in Carnamah (extant), designed by Hal Menzies at the PWD during 1948 (John Menzies).

Hal rejoined the PWD in 1947, and in 1948 commenced studies for the Architects Board of Western Australia (ABWA) examinations. Mixing socially with the students enrolled at the new Perth Technical College (PTC) architectural course, Hal was joint-auditor of the ASA with Peter Grigg (1925-2015) in 1949. By this stage Hal and Rona were renting in Mt Hawthorn. Then for about six months they stayed in the Portree Guest House at the corner of St George's Terrace and Victoria Avenue in Perth – relatively close to the PWD offices.



Architects at Rottnest Island early 1949: photo at left - rear Don Hall (reg no 191), Hal Menzies (reg no 214) with son John in lap, Poppy Hall, front Rhona Menzies, child Robin Hall, Ray (reg no 187) & Fran Moran; photo at right – couple at rear not identified, middle row Joan Wearne (later Shepherd), Alan Shepherd (reg no 217), Ray & Fran Moran, H. Richard Henderson (son of E. LeB., ASA Pres 1942), front row Rhona & Hal Menzies with son John in lap. (Jeff Moran).

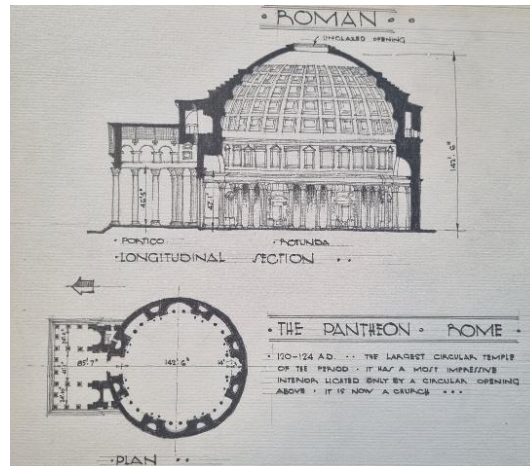
Later to be an architect of some prominence, Tony Brand (1932-2025) entered the PWD as a cadet in 1950, and remembered Hal Menzies and Ray Moran (1922-2015) as solid contributors to his formation as an architect, generously assisting with advice on drafting and other initial skills.



Hal Menzies at the drafting table c.1940s (John Menzies)

Having steadily worked away at the examination requirements for registration by ABWA, Hal achieved this career milestone in February 1951 (reg no 214), simultaneously with Max Bevilaqua (1929-2023, reg no 213), and also with the first seven architectural graduates of PTC - who were registered by virtue of completion of their Associateship in Architecture. At the time, the Board exams required passes in ten subjects: (i) Building Construction, (ii) Mechanics, (iii) Land Surveying, (iv) Quantity Surveying and Estimates, (v) Sanitary Science, (vi)

History of Architecture, (vii) Professional Practice, (viii) Art Certificate, (ix) Design Problem, and (x) Examination in Design. Hal's thesis presented for the exams was a 'Comparison of the Architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright and Le Corbusier'.



One of Hal's drawings for the History of Architecture part of the Board Exams (John Menzies).

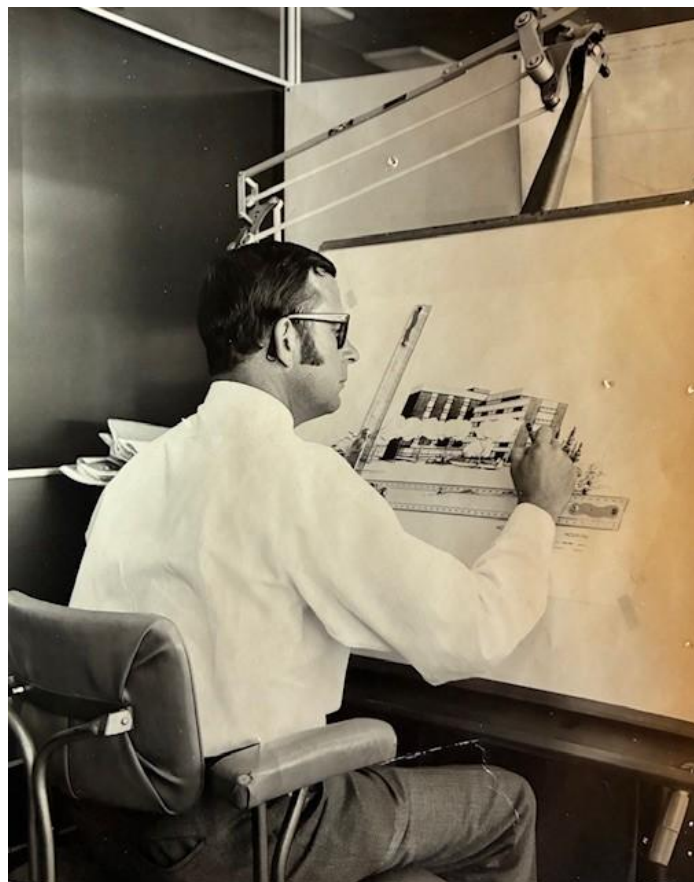
In 1951 Hal joined the Civilian Military Forces (Army Reserve) of the Royal Australian Engineers 13 Field Squadron and became a commissioned Lieutenant in 1954. The Menzies rented a home at 6 Melville Beach Road Applecross in 1951 and in 1953 their second child, Cherry was born. Hal designed a home at 6 Nisbet Road Applecross which was completed in 1954, in time to welcome the third child, Fiona in 1956. This home was constructed with the readily available materials of the time: limestone foundations, red clay double-brick walls, jarrah joinery, with a timber roof frame covered by corrugated asbestos-fibre-cement sheets. The Modern-style design featured polished jarrah floors throughout, an open plan lounge, dining area and a sunroom with a terracotta tiled floor.



Residence at 6 Nisbet Road Applecross (demolished); Cherry in front of a Ford (John Menzies).

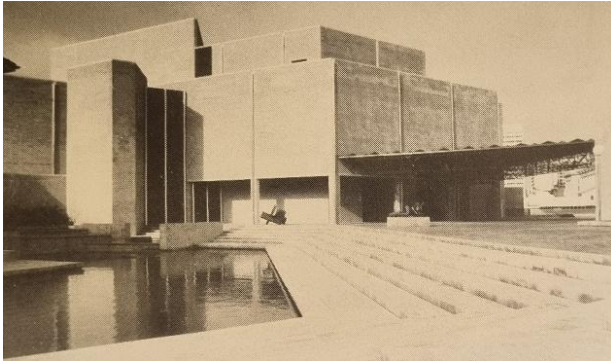
Hal left the PWD in 1954 to work with W.G. Bennett and Associates, a prominent architectural firm in Perth. He then began his own private practice in 1955. It seems he forewent a promotion, as the 1954 Public Service List has him to be raised on 1 January 1955 to a Grade 3 Architect, joining colleagues David Best, Alan Cann, Vin Davies, Ray Strauss, Alex Doepel, and Bill Waters at that seniority. Family recall that Hal designed the Willagee Park Hotel, opened in November 1956 on the corner of High Road (now Leach Highway) and Stock Road in Melville. It was closed in October 2002, and was used for bar scenes in the 2003 Australian film 'Japanese Story' starring Toni Collette; hence the building was demolished to make way for a supermarket.

Unfortunately, Hal's solo work coincided with a severe credit squeeze, and he returned in 1956 to the PWD, finding his niche and passion in the hospitals design office. Hal became second-in-charge of the regional hospitals design branch in 1958. In 1961 he was appointed Divisional Architect – South region and project architect for Albany, Bunbury, Geraldton and Northam regional hospitals, through to 1970.



Hal Menzies at work on the 1970 Northam Regional Hospital (John Menzies).

In 1971, Hal was appointed project PWD architect and coordinator for the Central Laundry, completed in 1974. In 1975 he was seconded as contract administrator for the Art Gallery of WA's construction, completed in 1980. Hal was listed at the next family residence, 80 Shenton Road Claremont, in the 1975 Royal Australian Institute of Architects (RAIA) membership list.



Art Gallery of WA (Molyneux, p.90); on PWD business at Dumas House in 1979 (John Menzies)

With a large staff working across many complex projects, attribution of the PWD's design work that was meeting the State's rapid growth in the 1950s-1970s to singular persons is unrealistic, but Hal Menzies was one of the long-serving and eventually higher-ranking State Government architects of that period. Principal PWD Architects in Hal Menzies' time included: 1930-1960 Albert (Paddy) Clare, 1960-1967 Walter Green, 1967-1968 Leonard Walters, 1968-1980 Stanley Cann, and 1980-1984 William (Jerry) Bateman.

With the State Government determined to soon effectively close the PWD, Hal saw the writing on the wall and moved-on in April 1983, settling in Mandurah and continuing as a private practitioner. He was appointed to the Boards of Management for the Mandurah Country Club and Mandurah Retirement Village. As the honorary architect of the Mandurah Country Club, Hal had designed Stage 1 of the clubhouse in 1961, and Stage 2 in 1964. Hal took on further major design projects in his retirement years, including the first stages of the Mandurah Retirement Village in Dudley Park. He eventually enjoyed a happy retirement with Rona at their residence at Lindley Street in Halls Head, a property that had been the family weekend retreat for years. Hal had designed a two level cottage around a century old fig tree. Hal was an accomplished pianist throughout the years in Perth, and following retirement in Mandurah continued to be in high demand on the social scene.

Hal's professional qualities were acknowledged by the conferring of the honorific titles Associate of the RAIA in 1951, and Fellow of the RAIA in 1970. He served on the Social and other WA Chapter Committees of the RAIA at various times. In further community service, Hal was appointed as Government Representative to ABWA in 1973, serving six years in the position.

One of the many mid-Twentieth Century Australian architects whose lives and careers were severely impacted by the effects of the Second World War, Hal still managed with Rona to raise a family in WA, forge a successful career and become a senior member of the highly-professional architectural team at the PWD in the 1960s and 1970s. Harold Bramwell Menzies died from prostate cancer on 29 July 2003 at Halls Head, aged 80 years. Rona Menzies passed away in 2013 aged 91 years. Their son John Bramwell Menzies became an architect, also registering in WA after passing ABWA exams, and enjoying a long career of his own.

References:

'An Army Wedding', *Albury Banner and Wodonga Express*, 22 June 1906, p.24 (parents of Hal). NAA A9301, 65691; MENZIES HAROLD BRAMWELL SN 65691, DOB 09 Jan 1922 [sic should read 1 Sept 1922], POB CAMPSIE NSW, POE SYDNEY, NOK MENZIES RONA.

'Marriages', *The West Australian*, 19 May 1945, p.1 (at Christ Church, St Kilda).

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Pers comms. and notes supplied by John Menzies April-November 2025.

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