



Bill Forbes

(courtesy Ian Forbes)

Howard Tyldesley Forbes (1904 -1975), known from birth as Bill, was born 20 March 1904 at *Marlwood* in Wellington Street, West Perth, the only son and eldest of five children to Walter James Waldie and Kate Clara Forbes. Bill's father was a well-known architect who came to Perth in 1897 from the east coast, where he had practiced for some years in both Melbourne and Sydney. Joining first with architects Wilkinson & Smith, then as chief draughtsman with E.H.D. Smith from 1900, and in mid-1904 being made the junior partner with Hobbs Smith & Forbes; Waldie Forbes became a highly respected member of the architectural profession in Western Australia. In 1911 Waldie moved his family from West Perth to the spacious blocks at Peppermint Grove on Freshwater Bay, where young Bill would grow up, and eventually settle his own family at houses in nearby Claremont and Mosman Park.

Forbes junior went to Christ Church Grammar Preparatory School, and then in his senior years to Scotch College. He matriculated to Sydney University where he studied under the eminent Professor Leslie Wilkinson from 1923–1928, residing at St Andrews University College and becoming Senior Student in 1928. Bill returned to Perth in January 1929 to join his father's practice, Hobbs Smith & Forbes, and in December 1929 became a registered architect in WA (no.133). Although E.H. Dean Smith had died suddenly in 1906, Sir Talbot Hobbs and Waldie Forbes carried on with the Smith name until 1932 when Athol Hobbs (Talbot Hobbs' son), Bill Forbes, and Alex Winning were admitted to the partnership, with the firm then known as Hobbs, Forbes & Partners.

In the early 1930s Athol Hobbs, Bill Forbes, Alex Winning, Bill Tracey and Leslie Walker formed the core of the office, although Walker returned to Melbourne during the Great Depression. By the end of 1934 Talbot Hobbs was seventy years old, and Waldie Forbes was sixty-five. With their influence, the practice maintained its client base during the difficult Depression years, later gaining many prestigious clients, producing commercial buildings for Shell Oil, Royal Insurance, WA Newspapers, Goldsbrough Mort, Temperance and General (T&G), and the Peninsula and Orient Co (P&O).

In 1935 the WA Newspaper's *Newspaper House* in St George's Terrace, designed and documented by Alex Winning, Athol Hobbs and Bill Forbes under Talbot Hobbs' and Waldie Forbes' directorship, won the Royal Institute of British Architects sponsored Street Medal. After a period of neglect, the landmark building has been refurbished in recent years. Following this era Bill Forbes maintained clients in education related buildings including Scotch College (introduced by E.H.D. Smith in 1904), St George's College at UWA (introduced by Talbot Hobbs in 1927), St Hilda's (from 1933), and Wesley College (from 1938). Bill was responsible for buildings at the Home of Peace in Subiaco, the Swan Boys Orphanage and the Mount Hospital.

In the years leading up to the war Bill Forbes was heavily involved with the architectural profession as secretary of the local Institute of Architects, and a member of the Architects Board of WA until 1941. In January 1938 Athol Hobbs and Alex Winning separated from the old firm to commence practice as Hobbs & Winning. Then in April of 1939, just less than a year after Talbot Hobbs' passing, Waldie Forbes died in Perth aged seventy. Bill eventually merged the business with that of J. Herbert Eales and John Fitzhardinge from Eales Cohen & Fitzhardinge, a partnership formed in 1939. With the outbreak of the Second World War, John Fitzhardinge joined the army in 1940, and after Japan entered the war, Bill Forbes left to join the navy in 1942. Both Hobbs Forbes & Partners, and Eales Cohen & Fitzhardinge are listed on the second floor of the WA Trustees Building in 1939, and were listed together there through the war, practicing together in association until 1946, when they merged as Forbes & Fitzhardinge. Successful, the firm added a fifth floor on top of the WA Trustees Building in 1954 to assist with housing the thriving practice.

It is also of interest that both Bill Forbes and John Fitzhardinge became brothers-in-law. They married the two youngest Brazier sisters, respectively Phyllis and Gwendolyn. Bill and Phyllis Forbes had two sons and a daughter. There were many continuing clients, earlier working with Talbot Hobbs and Waldie Forbes, that continued patronage of the firm until the 1970s. These included industrial companies such as the Swan Brewery, Dalgety & Co, Fremantle Cold Storage Co, Peter's American Delicacy Co (later Peter's Ice Cream), Harris Scarfe & Sandover, and Boans. Bill Forbes was responsible for overseeing the building of numerous banks including many rural premises across the State through to the 1960s.

In the 1950s and 60s Forbes & Fitzhardinge grew with the development of WA, retaining earlier clients who had deferred building due to post-war restrictions on materials and available funds. The partnership flourished with John Fitzhardinge providing design leadership and Bill Forbes consolidating and developing the client and practice base. In the early 1950s Forbes developed one of the first of Perth's post-war buildings, with replacement of offices designed in 1896 by Wilkinson & Smith for the South British Insurance Co at 23 Barrack Street. As the state's industrial base grew, the firm designed plants for Hoskins (later Vickers Hoskins), Brisbane & Wunderlich, Bell Bros, Union Maltings and the B.P. Kwinana oil refinery with their buildings starting in 1954. Plants followed these for BHP and Alcoa. They experienced growth in office buildings, retail and chain stores, hospitals and aged care.

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 and by Hobbs Winning Leighton. 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.

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

Howard (Bill) Tyldsley Forbes died 26 October 1975, aged 71 years. He had retired from practice in 1970 as a Life Fellow of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects (RAIA), and continued as a consultant until his death. In the later years he was involved with RAIA national professional practice issues and contractual matters. In retirement he was on the National Board of the Standards Association of Australia, and the Heart Foundation. Forbes & Fitzhardinge continued on to produce a large share of Western Australia's prestigious buildings up until the 1990s, then evolving into Forbes & Fitzhardinge Woodland, with the Forbes name finally disappearing as the company name changed to Cox Howlett & Bailey Woodland.

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South British Insurance Building 23 Barrack Street, Perth (SLWA 239839PD)



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



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



Bill Forbes' house at Richardson Avenue, Claremont - its original character is now severely altered by close development (c.1960s photo above courtesy Ian Forbes, below Google 2012).
The next family house of c.1965-66 by Forbes is at 1 Hill Terrace, Mosman Park.



Railton Temperance Hotel on the south-east corner of Murray and Pier Streets – view looking across Murray Street 1965 (SLWA 340700PD)



Railton Temperance Hotel on the south-east corner of Murray and Pier Streets – view looking across Pier Street 1965 (SLWA 340701PD)