



K. Murray Forster c.1937 ('Labassa Lives', Nat Trust Vic, Vol 5, 2017)

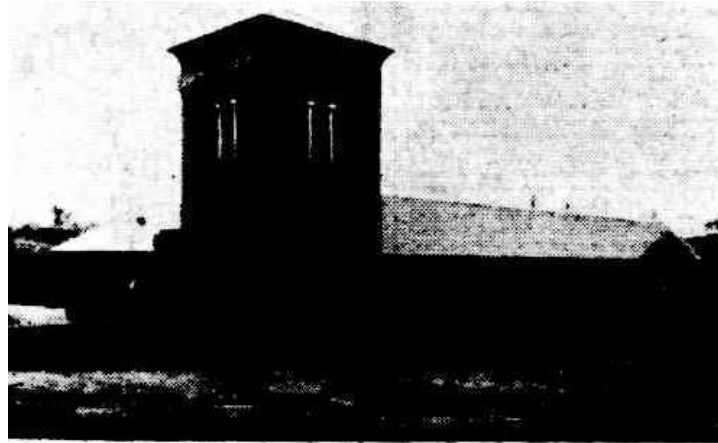
**Karl Murray Forster** (1907-1967) was born 30 October 1907 at the Manse in Cobram, Victoria. A son of Presbyterian minister Karl Dow Forster (1875-1945) and Annie Elizabeth (nee Murray) Forster, his brother Alex was born in 1911. 'Murray' Forster studied at the University of Melbourne Architectural Atelier while articled to F. Bruce Kemp, and registered as an architect in Victoria in 1930. Murray Forster and Edna Grace Cox were married in July 1932 at St Cuthbert's Presbyterian Church Brighton, with the bridegroom's father performing the ceremony. Later the same day the couple embarked on the *M.V. Westralia* for Perth, where Murray 'intended to practice for a year or two before going on to London'. Forster registered with the Architects Board of Western Australia (no. 136) in September 1932. The move west at just twenty-four years of age may have been sponsored by his parents, to assist in gaining Presbyterian Church work in WA. Karl Forster senior had a brother who was also a minister, and they were to be increasingly influential in Presbyterian Church affairs.



'Westcourt' at 76-86 Colin Street in West Perth (*The West Australian*, 29 April 1933, p.6).

Setting up an office on the third floor of the Orient Line Building in William Street at Perth, Forster was soon active in domestic design. He called tenders in December 1932 for a 'brick attic residence' on the corner of Hillway and Broadway in Nedlands (demolished c.2020), and for the conversion of Milford Terrace at Colin Street in West Perth into twelve self-contained flats. Renamed Westcourt, the complex with garages and laundries was completed mid-1933.

By May of 1933, Forster's design of a 'Model Dairy' was erected for Alex Dreyer and located at the corner of Bulimba and the Perth-Fremantle Roads (now Stirling Highway) in Claremont. A tower was placed to contain cooling coils. Known as the Central Dairy, the milk distributing depot incorporated the latest methods in milk handling, cooling, storage, and pasteurizing.



This modern model dairy has just been completed in Claremont for Mr. Alex Dreyer. The architect was Mr. K. Murray Forster.

Dairy at corner of Bulimba and the Perth-Fremantle Roads (now Stirling Highway) in Claremont  
(*The West Australian*, 27 May 1933, p.6).

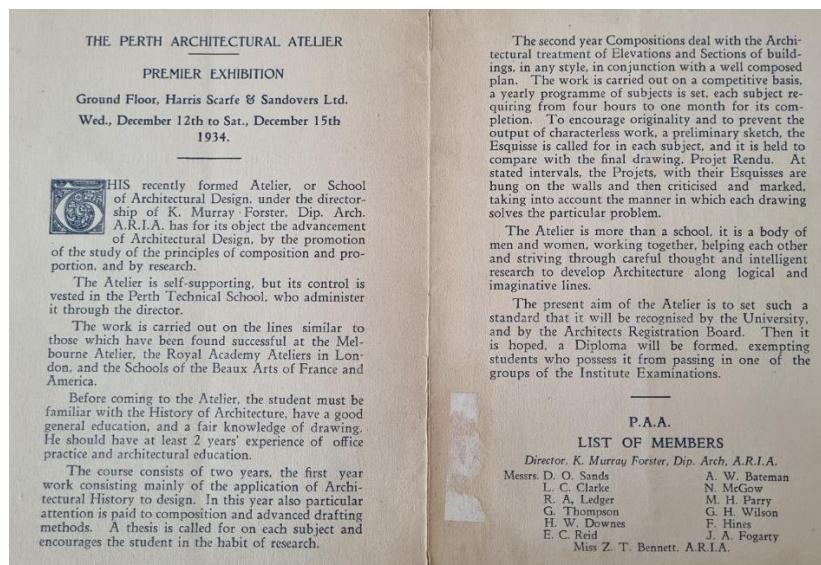
Rev Karl Forster, then of the Brighton Presbyterian Church at Melbourne, and his wife Annie crossed Australia by train to visit their son, daughter-in-law, and newly-born granddaughter Murraie at 16 Thomas Street Nedlands in September 1933. By December 1933 Murray had designed a 'Modern Beauty Parlour' with eight private rooms in 'Petty's' at Hay Street Perth, and in January 1934 a contract was signed for a brick and tile residence he had drawn for the corner of Archdeacon Street and McKay Road [Melvista Avenue] in Nedlands – featuring neon 'strip lighting' in the main rooms. Continuing with modest residential work, in February 1934 Forster accepted a tender for a house at Eton Street in North Perth.



The residence at 137 Melvista Avenue [19 McKay Rd], corner of Archdeacon Steet in Nedlands is most likely the residence designed by Forster at this intersection in late 1933 (Google 2023).

Murray Forster's training and experience at the Melbourne Architectural Atelier was seen by the senior members of the architectural profession in WA as a valuable asset and opportunity. So much so that in May of 1934, *The West Australian* newspaper announced that an 'Architectural Atelier had recently commenced under the direction of Mr. K. Murray Forster architect, in concert with the Architectural Association of Western Australia, a body comprised mainly of students, and was to be run on similar lines to that conducted in Melbourne'.

Thus Forster was the director of the inaugural Perth Architectural Atelier (PAA), established at Perth Technical College (PTC). The atelier consisted of lectures and practical work, and was to embrace a two year course, with an examination at the end of each year. It was self-supporting, but its control was vested in PTC, which had set aside a room in the tower of its St George's Terrace premises, and which administered the atelier through the director. The aim of the course was to set such a standard that it would be recognized by the University of Western Australia (UWA) and by the Architects Board of WA. It was noted that the local Institute of Architects had already approved of the introduction of the atelier.



Portion of brochure for the Perth Architectural Atelier 'Premier Exhibition' shown at Harris, Scarfe & Sandovers in Perth, opened by Sir J. Talbot Hobbs in December 1934. (Chris Ledger)

The PAA was relocated to UWA in 1936, and renamed the School of Architectural Design under the guidance of W.T. (Bill) Leighton (1905-1990). With the onset of the Second World War (1939-1945), the studio design class experienced difficulties with support and was discontinued in the early stages of the conflict, with a formal architectural course not finally established at PTC until 1946.

Further illustrating his youthful influence in WA, Forster gave a talk to the Town Planning Institute of WA in July 1934 on the 'Planning of a Model City'. By August in 1934, *The West Australian* noted his design of further residences at Nedlands and Swanbourne: 'The tender of Mr. A. Stephen, amounting to £910, for the erection of a five room brick residence in Dalkeith Road, South Nedlands for Mrs. T.L. Reynolds, and Mr. G. Manera's tender of £984 for construction of a five-room brick house in [at no.53] Louise Street, Nedlands for Mrs. A.E. Dry, have been accepted. Eleven tenders, ranging from £2 120 to £1 649, have been received for the building of a nine-room brick attic residence in Alexander [Alexandra] Avenue, Swanbourne, for Captain J.M. Miller. The houses, which were designed by Mr. K. Murray Forster, will have terra cotta tile roofs, coloured kitchens and bathrooms, texture walls and modern well ceilings'.



Captain J.M. Miller residence of 1934 at 2 Alexandra Avenue Swanbourne (Google 2023)

By January 1935, *The West Australian* noted his design of further residences in the rapidly developing western suburbs of Perth: 'Plans are being prepared by Mr. K. Murray Forster for an attic residence to be erected in North-street, Mt. Lawley at a cost of £1 250, and for a five-room residence in Cottesloe to cost £800. A residence in Mt. Lawley costing £1 720, and alterations to a residence in Guildford are under supervision. Tenders are being called by the architect (Forster) for a six room manse to be erected in Highway [now Kingsway], Nedlands, for the Commissioners of the Presbyterian Church of WA.'

Also in January 1935, Forster called tenders for a modest Presbyterian Church – what was to become the Henderson Memorial Presbyterian Church at 101 Kimberley Street in West Leederville. On 2 March 1935, a foundation stone was laid by Lady McNess for the church to be built at a cost of £700.



Forster-designed Presbyterian manse of 1935 at 42 Kingsway Nedlands, with the Cameron Chisholm & Nicol designed St Paul's Church of 1955 at left of photo (Google 2023).



Perspective drawing of a church to be erected in Kimberley-street Leederville for the Commissioners of the Presbyterian Church of Western Australia. The architect is Mr. K. Murray Forster.



Henderson Memorial Presbyterian Church at 101 Kimberley Street in West Leederville of 1935 (*The West Australian*, 19 January 1935, p.4; Google 2023).

Further information regarding Forster-designed works in WA could be found by more detailed research utilising online sources including 'Trove', checking the tender notices with the locations of owners recorded in Wisers' WA Directories. In March 1935, *The West Australian* reported that 'The tender of Mr. L.A. Pearce of £1 250 for the erection of a five-room brick residence in North-street, Mt. Lawley, for Mr. C.A. Anderson; and the tender of Mr. H. F. Landwehr of £850 for a five-room residence, which will be erected in Airlie-street, Claremont, for Mr. J. N. Smith, have been accepted by the architect, Mr. K. Murray Forster.'

Also in March 1935, the enthusiastic architect may have found the more senior members of the profession in WA to be capable of mild rebuke to their youthful prodigy. It was noted in the press that: *At the annual meeting of the Institute of the Architects of Western Australia last night Mr. K.M. Forster said that the Victorian Institute was to be congratulated on the way in which it had acted as a nagging wife and by continually harping on the subject had succeeded in persuading the Government to commission architects in private practice to design and supervise the erection of public buildings. He thought that the West Australian Institute should do something in this direction. 'I would like to ask Mr. Forster if he knows how much this institute has already done in that respect,'*

*remarked Mr. E. G. Cohen. 'Quite a lot,' interjected the Principal Government Architect (Mr. A. E. Clare), drily. 'There you are; you have got it straight from the horse's mouth,' replied Mr. Cohen, amid laughter.*

*In April 1935 the Daily News carried note of the Forsters travel to Melbourne with their infant child, and suggestion of their expected return: Mr. and Mrs. K. Murray Forster, with their daughter, Murraie, left for Melbourne by train on Saturday to attend the wedding of Mr. Forster's brother, Alexander. The marriage will be performed by the bridegroom's father at St. Cuthbert's Presbyterian Church, Brighton. Mr. Murray Forster will make a hurried survey of the work at the Melbourne University Atelier, with a view to the conducting of the Perth Atelier, of which he is the director. Other matters of architectural interest will also be investigated. Mrs. Forster intends remaining with her parents at 'Inchdean,' Brighton Beach, for three months.*

Perhaps the pressure of running the Atelier, and the desire of the young couple to return to the support of family in Victoria led to their permanent return to Victoria. *The Herald* in Melbourne reported in August 1935: *Architect Returns. Mr K. Murray Forster, architect, who has been practising in Western Australia for three years, has returned to Melbourne, and begun practice at 405 Collins Street. Mr. Forster obtained the Diploma of Architecture at Melbourne University, and, since 1933 has been the director of the Perth Architectural Atelier, a post graduate school of architectural design.* A reference of August 1936 that Forster wrote for his former PAA student Ron Ledger (1904-1998) gave his office address as Capel Court, 375 Collins Street Melbourne.

Murray Forster's architectural portfolio is of greatest significance in the State of Victoria, where he was very active from the late 1930s onward. After resuming in Melbourne, Forster occasionally worked with his former boss Bruce Kemp on Presbyterian projects including churches, kindergartens and homes, and this continued in the early post-Second World War era.

In 1951, Forster entered into partnership with Keith Reid (1906-1999), another leading Presbyterian architect, as a means to maintain his practice during a planned six-month overseas tour to Great Britain and Europe in 1952. The two men rented office space in the upstairs front room of a two-storey terrace house on Latrobe Street. The partnership, styled as Keith Reid & K Murray Forster, was

dissolved amicably after Forster returned from Europe, with the two former partners continuing to share the same office space for some years thence. Forster then practiced under his own name again, still specializing in work for the Presbyterian Church. In 1963, the practice became Murray Forster & Walsh after the elevation to partnership of longtime employee Allen Walsh, who would continue running the office after Forster's early death four years later.

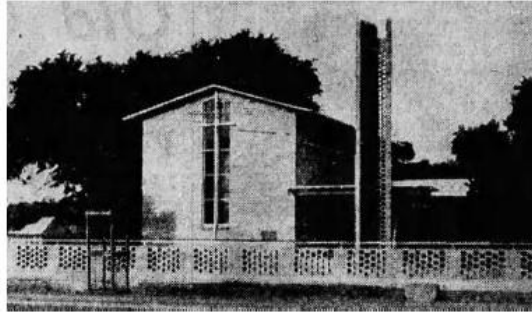
Some of K. Murray Forster's domestic and church work in Victoria has more recently been documented within various heritage reports. A Presbyterian manse designed by Forster was built at 10 Wilson Street Brighton in the early 1940s - he was not only a local resident, but also a son of the church's long-serving minister. An old church at 11 Wilson Street was demolished in 1950, and a new church hall – again designed by Forster, built in its place in 1951.



St Margaret's Presbyterian Church of 1953-1954 at 106 Hotham Street, St Kilda East: - perspective by K Murray Forster & Associates, and 2019 photo (Built Heritage Pty Ltd).

Murray Forster's design of St Margaret's Presbyterian Church at Hotham Street St Kilda East, is a cream brick church erected in 1953-1954 and comprising a gable-roofed hall-like nave with a flat-roofed front foyer wing that incorporates a projecting covered walkway. St Margaret's, the unusual design of which generated an uncommon degree of comment in the daily and architectural press, is considered significant for its taking inspiration from modernist church architecture that Forster had seen during his recent overseas trip.

Built Heritage Pty Ltd commented in 2020 that: 'Considered in Forster's wider body of church architecture, St Margaret's was the first in a series of churches that he designed in a stripped-back modernist mode influenced by Continental European precedents. His much-published United Protestant Church in Woomera, South Australia (1954), although of stone construction, is otherwise similar to St Margaret's. Echoes of his modernist approach recur in several of Forster's subsequent Presbyterian churches in Victoria, including those at 146 High Street, Heathcote (1955) and 92 Main Street, Pakenham East (1960).'



*Presbyterian Church at Heathcote  
(K Murray Forster & Associates, 1955)  
source: Age, 3 March 1956*

Presbyterian Church at 146 High Street, Heathcote of 1955 (Built Heritage Pty Ltd).

The St David's Uniting Church and Hall complex at Brunswick West includes a church hall (1951) and church (1962). The foundation stone of the church was laid in May 1962. It was designed by Murray Forster and Allen Walsh. Forster and Walsh are both attributed to the Broadmeadows Town Hall, although they enjoyed success independently as well. Forster is also attributed to the Thornbury Uniting Church Complex at 7-15 Rossmoyne Street Thornbury, and the Toora Uniting Church at 4 Dutton Street Toora.



St David's Uniting Church and Hall, 72-76 Melville Road, Brunswick West (May 2020, Morleand City Council Heritage Citation, Extent Heritage Pty Ltd,)

Although a practitioner in WA for only a relatively brief period, some of the youthful Forster's domestic work in Perth's developing suburbs of the 1930s still remains, and he has primary importance in Western Australian architectural history as the inaugural director of the Perth Architectural Atelier, a long-desired formal training course for architectural students in the western State. A school of architectural design for students, as an alternative to individuals gaining skills by serving articles under an experienced practitioner, was only achieved after the Second World War with the course established at PTC under William (Bill) Robertson (1905-1953) in 1946.



K. Murray Forster died at Caulfield, Victoria on 28 July 1967, and was noted as the loved husband of Edna, loving father of Murraie [Macfarlane] and Kirsty [Ross].

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Contributing author: John Taylor

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