



Bob Blatchford in later years (Blatchford family)

Robert Vivian Blatchford (1918-1989) was born 23 May 1918 at the South Perth residence of his parents Torrington and Annie Harriet (nee Zahel) Blatchford, who had married at St Mary's Church, Colin Street West Perth in April 1906. The couple had five sons - John Torrington (b.1907), Colin Francis (b.1908), Alan (b.1911), Peter Francis (b.1914, died at Southern Cross 10 months old), and 'Bob' (b.1918).

Torrington Blatchford came to Western Australia from New South Wales in 1897, joining the State Government's Mines Department as senior assistant geologist. Four years later he left the department to become a metallurgist and surveyor with Paddington Consols Ltd. After being in private practice (Black, Blatchford and Grut) at the Kalgoorlie goldfields, he rejoined the department around 1912 and was subsequently appointed Assistant State Mining Engineer. In 1928 Blatchford became Government Geologist, and in 1931 he accompanied an expedition to Central Australia in search of "Lasseter's Reef". In 1934 he again retired from the government to take up a position with the Australian Machinery and Investment Co, and subsequently returned to private mining consulting, including proving the Halley's Comet mine at Marble Bar for the De Bernales Group in 1936. Torrington Blatchford died at Roebourne in June 1938.

Bob Blatchford attended Wesley College in South Perth, and Leaving Certificate results for Bob are listed in the press during January 1936. Bob's oldest brother John, an engineer with the Public Works Department (PWD), died at South Perth in September 1936, aged just 29 years. Bob's other remaining brothers Colin and Allan both departed WA in November 1937, and it appears twenty-year old Bob may have been the lone child remaining at Perth to support his mother when she flew to Roebourne for her husband's funeral.

It appears that Bob became an articled student c.1936 with the innovative architect Harold Krantz (1906-1999). At that time the only other pathway to become an architect in WA was by obtaining a cadet-ship with the PWD. In the mid to late 1930s, after a number of small projects for friends and business associates, Krantz, together with associate architects Margaret Pitt Morison (1900-1985) and John Oldham (1907–1999), began to design small blocks of flats and flat conversions. Some of these early two storey flats such as Winthrop, Varsity and Melleray, Nedlands, resembled enlarged houses while in the city some of the first multi storey blocks such as Oddfellows, Arbordale and Riviera represented a new type of flat construction.

The supposition that Bob was articled to Krantz comes from a June 1938 tender advertisement in *The West Australian* for alterations and additions to a residence at South Perth, noting that specifications and plans were available from R. Blatchford at office 79 in the AMP Buildings. *Wises Directory* of 1938 confirms that Krantz's office was at this location. In July 1938 a building permit was issued to Blatchford for the £210 conversion of a residence at Lyall Street South Perth into flats. Working in the prolific Krantz's office, Bob had probably seen the potential to assist his parents to develop their Lyall Street home.



Architectural Association Executive and Members 1937-38 (*Tee Square Journal*, 1937, p.5)

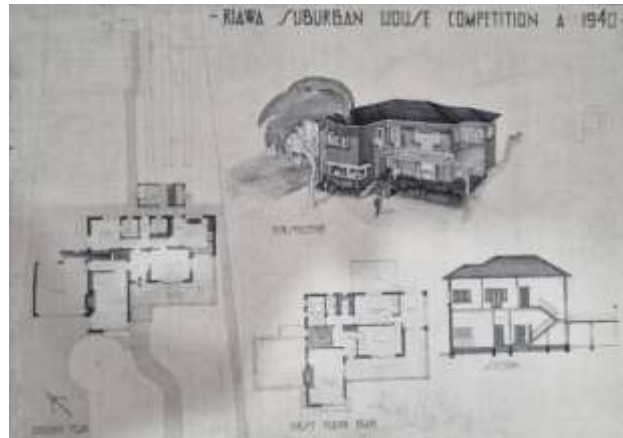
Bob joined the largely student body, the Architectural Association of WA, almost certainly also enjoying part-time study at the University of Western Australia (UWA). The School of Architectural Design was commenced at UWA in 1936, initially under William Leighton (1905-1990), and Bob would also have attended the architectural history lectures given at UWA by the elderly Alfred Wright (1861-1939). By mid-1940 Bill Leighton had signed up for Second World War (1939-1945) service, and the class was under the aegis of Marshall Clifton (1903–1975). With the onset of the war, and many architects away (Clifton joined the Army in 1941), the studio class experienced difficulties with support and was discontinued, with a formal architectural design course not finally established at Perth Technical College until 1946.



The Design Class at UWA Crawley, with Bill Leighton standing front left, Bob Blatchford may be at the rear left of the photo (Architectural Association's *Tee Square Journal* of 1937, p.27).

In August 1939 it was announced that Bob Blatchford with his colleagues Bill Durack, Bill Grigg, Arthur Philpot, and Jan Rae had been successful in passing the architectural section of the art certificate examination held by UWA. Following the outbreak of the war in 1939, young Bob sought to follow his brother Alan into service with the Australian forces, but was rejected in 1940 due to his diabetes, and only approved to serve with 'Home Guard' duties from 1942. Many of Bob's architectural colleagues joined up, and not all survived the conflict. Harry Wraith Downes (1918-1943), Osborne Kirkton Fisher (1913-1941), Ernest William Grigg (1917-1942), Leonard Courtney Laver (1917-1943), John Henry Stubbs (1918-1942), and Michael Courthorpe Haynes (1920-1942) were all younger members of the WA architectural profession whose lives were cut short by the horrors of the Second World War. In 1943 Zoie Bennett (1911-1985) lost her husband John Fryer, and Vida Wright's (1915-2005) fiancé Bill Philippon was killed in New Guinea.

In 1940 the Royal Institute of the Architects of Western Australia (RIAWA) held a competition for students to design of a house to cost no more than £2 000, and Bob's entry took second place, beaten only by his slightly more senior colleague in Tony O'Hara (1917-2013).



Bob Blatchford's second place house design in a Royal Institute of Architects of Western Australia student design competition (*The Architect*, June 1940, p.19).

By December 1940 it was noted in 'The Students' Column' of *The Architect* (the RIAWA periodical) that Bob was working at the PWD along with Allan Campbell Douglas (1915-1992) whose articles with Reg Summerhayes had been terminated due to the outbreak of the war. We can surmise that Bob's articulated arrangements had either been completed or suffered the same fate as Douglas', as they were noted as 'late draughtsmen to city architects'.

Bob Blatchford was elected as president of the Architectural Students' Association (ASA) in March 1941, and was soon recognized as an energetic and vocal leader. The ASA held its annual 'T-Square Ball' at the Embassy Ballroom in May 1941, and with over 400 attendees, even in war-time it continued to be one of the biggest social events in Perth each year. The committee in charge of arrangements for the ball included Blatchford, Allan Douglas, John Mercer, Marie Jackson, Jan Rae, Bob Katz, Richard Henderson, Ray Moran and Ken Rosenthal.

Blatchford led 55 members of the ASA in 1941-1942, with most serving in the forces or having been drawn into war-related activity for various government design and survey departments. None-the-less his writings published in *The Architect* outlined his constructive criticisms of ongoing architectural education, particularly in regard to the Architects Board of WA (ABWA) examinations

required for registration as an architect in the State. Bob wasn't afraid to question the lack of activity by the RIAWA, penning a highly critical letter "Is the Institute Committing Hara-kiri?" in *The Architect* of September 1941.

In his 'Retiring President's Report' of March 1942, Bob gave an excellent outline of the study opportunities available at the time and the requirements to satisfy the ABWA examinations, expressing his concern with his own and others failure in recent exams. At the time, passes in ten subjects including (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 were required. Eventually managing to pass all the exams, Bob registered (no. 172) with ABWA in April 1943, one of very few to attain this achievement during the war years.

Blatchford set out in private practice from mid-1945, initially with an office at 15 Howard Street in Perth. He advertised tenders in September 1945 for the conversion of a South Perth residence into flats, perhaps following on his pre-war experience in that field. Returning to WA from Queensland after war service, Allan Douglas briefly worked with his colleague Blatchford from 1946, before taking up a teaching position at Perth Technical College. Bob was later to join with Allan in teaching architecture at the Western Australian Institute of Technology (WAIT), in Bob's case from January 1969 to July 1982. Blatchford's immediate post-war work was primarily domestic, with a string of single residences completed at Applecross, Claremont, Nedlands and Floreat Park during 1946-1949.



Bob Blatchford was noted as the architectural students' best golfer in friendly competition with dental and law students during 1937, and mentioned frequently within golf reports in the press.

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

James Waterson Johnson (1919-2015) had been articled to Perth architect Kenneth Charles Duncan (1898-1983) for 3 years before enlisting for war service in 1941, and Johnson joined Blatchford as a partner in late 1948. In August 1949, they merged with W.G. Bennett and Associates to form the firm of Bennett, Blatchford, Allen and Johnson (BBA & J). The partners were William G. Bennett, Nancy L. Allen, Robert V. Blatchford, G. Douglas Allen, and James W. Johnson. A 1950 project attributed to BBA & J was the Lady Mitchell Memorial Health Centre at Bunbury. The union with 'Bull' Bennett and his team was short-lived - Robert Blatchford and Johnson Architects recommenced practice on their own account in May 1950!

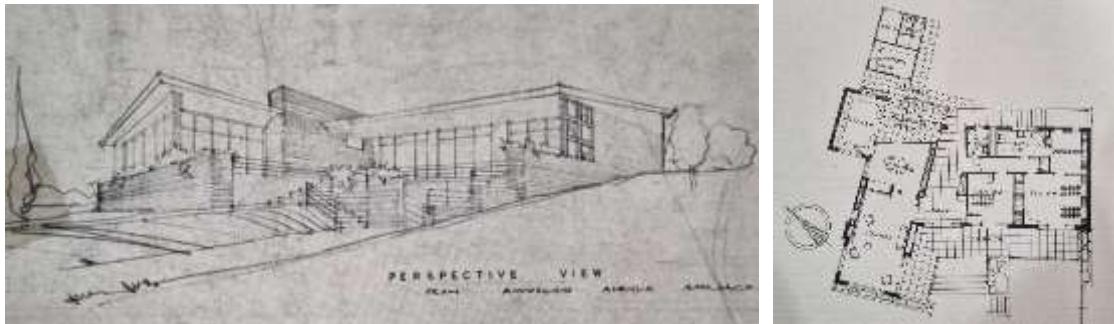
Bob's mother 'Nan' Blatchford died in March 1951 at South Perth aged 74 years. At this time Colin was in Scotland and Allan was in Fiji, with Bob her only remaining child in WA. Tragically, Nan had passed away just prior to Bob's marriage to Violet Mary ('Tui') Bartlett at St George's Cathedral Perth in May 1951. The couple had sons Ian Torrington (b.1952) and David (b.1954), both born at St Anne's in Mount Lawley.



Mr. and Mrs. Robert Blatchford, who were married at St. George's Cathedral, this week. The bride was formerly Miss Tui Bartlett of Gooseberry Hill.

Bob Blatchford and 'Tui' Bartlett were married at St George's Cathedral Perth in May 1951
(*Western Mail*, 10 May 1951, p.33).

In 1949-1952 Bob's office was in the Charles Oldham (1865-1920) designed Federation-era chambers at 20 Howard Street Perth, in 1958 at 188 St George's Terrace Perth, and in 1961-69 at the Perpetual Trustees Building, a rare Art Nouveau design by Oldham at 89 St George's Terrace Perth.



Bob Blatchford's sketch and floor plan for a residence built in 1953 at Kingsland Avenue in City Beach (*The Architect*, December 1952, cover, p.14).

Blatchford and Johnson appear to have gone their individual ways in 1952, as by May 1952 Bob was noted as the sole architect of a new Community Hospital at the corner of South Terrace and Fortune Street in South Perth. He called tenders for the 27-bed hospital with two storey staff quarters in November 1953, and it was built from 1954.



Blatchford's South Perth Community Hospital (*The West Australian*, 15 December 1952, p.6).

Bob Blatchford acted as supervising architect for two projects in WA designed by Melbourne ecclesiastical architect Louis Reginald Williams (1890–1980). The first was St Edmund's Church at Pangbourne Street, Wembley. It was built at a cost, including furniture, of £40 000, and consecrated by Archbishop Moline in 1956. The impressive St Boniface Anglican Cathedral at Parkfield Street Bunbury, was built from 1961.



Sketch of St Edmund's Church at Pangbourne Street, Wembley (*The West Australian*, 26 June 1954, p.20), and as-built view (<https://www.stedmunds.org.au/history>)

Bob designed a new library for the Shire of Kalamunda, a tender was accepted for its construction in 1962, and it was opened in April 1963 by Charles Court. The plan became a suggested model for other libraries, and was published within 'Siting and design of public library buildings' by the Library Board of Western Australia in 1962.



Kalamunda Public Library of 1963, pictured c.1969 (SLWA 231811PD).

Heritage Council of WA records for places designed by Bob Blatchford include:

1954 South Perth Community Centre Hospital HCWA place number 04808;

1961 St Boniface Anglican Cathedral HCWA place number 05667;

1962 Swanbourne High School HCWA place number 03966; and

1967 Morowa Police Station and Court House HCWA place number 10150.



Morowa Police Station, 2 Stokes Road Morawa (Google 2024)

Bob's registration address was listed by ABWA from 1970-1987 as 25 Gooseberry Hill Road, Gooseberry Hill - a house of his own design built towards the end of the 1950s. Bob Blatchford died 22 August 1989 at Gooseberry Hill, aged 71 years, and Tui survived him by twenty years, passing away 16 October 2009 at Gooseberry Hill aged 90 years.

Achieving success from a relatively modest upbringing in the 1920-1930s, then interrupted by the difficulties of the Second World War, Bob Blatchford's long-serving and significant contributions to both practice and architectural education in WA may gain greater study and recognition. His professional qualities were acknowledged by the conferring of the honorific titles ARAIA 1943, and FRAIA in 1970.

References:

- 'Marriages', *The West Australian*, 28 April 1906, p.1 (at St Mary's Church Colin St West Perth).
- 'Births', *The West Australian*, 25 May 1918, p.1 (Bob at South Perth).
- 'Personal', *The West Australian*, 30 April 1936, p.18 (John Blatchford PWD engineer).
- 'Deaths', *The West Australian*, 25 September 1936, p.1 (of John at Subiaco).
- 'Farewell Cocktail Party', *Sunday Times*, 7 November 1937, p.31 (for Colin and Allan).
- 'Mr T. Blatchford Dead', *Western Mail*, 2 June 1938, p.7 (background info for Torrington, photo).
- 'Mr T. Blatchford Dead', *Northern Times*, 3 June 1938, p.3 (funeral Roebourne, wife attended).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 14 June 1938, p.1 'Tenders' (alts and adds to residence at South Perth, specifications and plans available from R. Blatchford at 79 AMP Buildings).
- 'This Week's Permits', *The West Australian*, 16 July 1938, p.4 (South Perth building permit issued to Mr Blatchford for £210 conversion of Lyall St residence into flats).
- 'General News', *The West Australian*, 31 August 1939, p.6 (art certificate in architecture UWA).
- 'The Students' Column', *The Architect*, December 1940, p.25 (Blatchford and Douglas at PWD).
- NAA B883, WX173; BLATCHFORD ALAN : Service Number - WX173 : DOB 03 Aug 1911 : POB KALGOORLIE WA : POE NORTHAM WA : NOK - BLATCHFORD A.
- NAA B884, W48016; BLATCHFORD ROBERT VIVIAN : Service Number - W48016 : DOB 23 May 1918 : POB PERTH WA : POE PERTH WA : NOK BLATCHFORD ANNE.
- 'Architectural Students' Association', *The Architect*, June 1941, pp.24-25 (RVB President).
- 'Patriotic Dances', *The West Australian*, 5 May 1941, p.4 (T-Square Ball at Embassy Ballroom).
- "Is the Institute Committing Hara-kiri?", *The Architect*, September 1941, p.16-17 (highly critical letter from Blatchford, President of the Architectural Students' Association, to the editor).
- 'Architectural Students' Association', *The Architect*, December 1941, p.14 (President's Report).
- 'Retiring President's Report', *The Architect*, March 1942, pp.16-18 (ASA, comprehensive notes).
- 'Post-War Housing', *The Architect*, September 1944, pp.16-18 (wide-ranging paper by RVB).
- 'Students' Notes', *The Architect*, June 1945, p.12 (RVB entering into private practice).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 5 September 1945, p.9 (conversion South Perth res into flats).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 16 January 1946, p.9 (additions to a Perth bakery).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 26 July 1946, p.15 (res Applecross for T.J. Lewis).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 13 September 1946, p.2 (Drew Rd Applecross, Ross A. Little).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 23 September 1946, p.13 (Duncraig Rd Applecross, A.E. Kay).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 23 November 1946, p.14 (Canning Hy Applecross, A.G. Wells).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 9 April 1947, p.3 (28 Stirling Rd Claremont for Harry Taylor).

'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 14 August 1947, p.17 (Portland St Nedlands for K. Buckan).

'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 6 November 1948, p.25 (Tweedale Rd Applecross H.B. Harris).

'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 27 March 1948, p.26 (Minora Road Nedlands for K.J. Clark).

'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 4 June 1949, p.27 (Selby St Floreat Park for J.L. Prichard).

'Special Advertisements', *Sunday Times*, 14 August 1949, p.6 (formation of BBA & J).

'Special Advertisements', *The West Australian*, 17 May 1950, p.3 (Blatchford Johnson restart).

'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 7 February 1951, p.23 (res South Bunbury, Dr Dermot Foster).

'Deaths', *The West Australian*, 24 March 1951, p.23 (Nan Blatchford of 4 Lyall St South Perth).

'People and Parties', *The West Australian*, 5 May 1951, p.5 (wedding at St George's Cathedral).

'Births', *The West Australian*, 18 January 1952, p.20 (a son at St Anne's Mt Lawley).

'South Perth Plans New Hospital', *The West Australian*, 30 May 1952, p.3, (South Terrace).

'How South Perth Community Hospital will look', *The West Australian*, 15 December 1952, p.6.

'Local Housing – House at City Beach', *The Architect*, December 1952, cover, pp.14-15 (Kingsland Avenue).

'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 28 November 1953, p.47 (South Perth Hospital).

'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 16 February 1954, p.18 (office block South Suburban Bakery 142 Hubert St Victoria Park).

'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 10 April 1954, p.40 (Murray River Farm, Coolup, W.J. Gilbert).

'A Church will cost £35 000', *The West Australian*, 26 June 1954, p.20 (St Edmund's Wembley).

'Big Project Proposed at Gwalia', *The West Australian*, 18 December 1954, p.3 (mess hall and men's quarters).

'Births', *The West Australian*, 21 December 1954, p.23 (a son at St Anne's).

State Records Office of WA files:

Swanbourne High School - Additions 1969/70. Commission to private architects - R. Blatchford.

AU WA S82 cons1562 1969/0420 Item 1969-04-19 - 1972-01-21

Swanbourne Senior High School - Library Extensions - Commission to Private Architect - Robert Blatchford. SRO AU WA S82 cons1608 1973/0762 Item 1973-06-12 - 1976-06-14.

John Slee, 'Cala Munnda, a home in the forest, a history of Kalamunda', Shire of Kalamunda, 1979, pp.209-210 (library at Railway Street).

'Academic Staff, Architecture, 1946-1996', Barbara van Bronswijk (ed.), *Visions and Voices: Curtin University Celebrates 50 Years of Architectural Education 1946-1996*, School of Architecture Construction and Planning, Curtin University of Technology, Bentley, 1996, p.53.

Heritage Committee review: 15 August 2024 Last updated: 15 August 2024

Citation details:

Taylor, Dr John J., 'Robert Vivian Blatchford (1918-1989)', *Western Australian Architect Biographies*, <http://www.taylorarchitects.com.au/Biographies.html> accessed DATE.