



Thomas Powell

(Battye, J.S., *Cyclopedia of Western Australia*, Vol.1, 1912, p.629)

Thomas Walter Lloyd Powell (1864-1946) was born 18 November 1864 in Melbourne, a son of architect Levi Powell. He received his early education at a State school and concluded private school studies at the age of sixteen. He then joined the office of J.H. Fox, quantity surveyor, with whom he studied for two years before commencing work with his father. In 1882 Thomas was articled to Powell senior, who at that time carried on a general practice in Melbourne (Powell & Whitaker), and after the decease of his father in March 1885, young Thomas continued in business with R.B. Whitaker. This partnership lasted for about five years, after which Powell practised on his own.

In the period 1891-1894, Powell was listed in practice at 317 Collins Street, Melbourne. In April 1894 Thomas was married to Helen Maxwell Powell at Camberwell; they had children Marguerite 'Rita' (c1895-19xx); Gweneira Mary (c1896-1986); Thomas Levi (died at 4 months 1897); Dyllis Lloyd (died at 4 months 1900); and Brenda Lois (1902-1970).

With major depression in Victoria during the early 1890s, he decided to migrate to gold-boom Western Australia, where prospects were far brighter. Arriving at Perth in 1896, he became associated in professional practice with James William Wright (1854-1917). During 1903-1905 Powell produced a number of domestic works in his own name, and was listed in practice at Moir's Chambers, St Georges Terrace, Perth before in 1906 joining in partnership with Wright and Alexander Donald Cameron (1878-1961) as Wright Powell & Cameron. Powell was at one time secretary of the West Australian Institute of Architects.

In 1898 the Powell family lived at 12 Vincent Street Perth, in 1899-1904 at *Maxwellton* Devon Road Claremont [Swanbourne], 1905-1920 at *Maxwellton* Riley Road Claremont, and 1922 onward at *Maxwellton* 85 Bay View Terrace, Claremont. An early twentieth century 'local' project for Powell was the Nedlands Swimming Baths and Jetty, designed by Wright Powell & Cameron as part of the development of facilities for the Nedlands Tramway Estate. The jetty was constructed in 1908 from material brought in by barge on the Swan River, and it was a vital link in the development of the adjacent Broadway and its tramway. The swimming baths were built with a fully enclosed shark proof area at a cost of £1,500 and opened in February 1909 by Sir John Forrest, first Premier of Western Australia.

In 1912 it was noted that Powell as Vestry Secretary of Christ Church Claremont 'gives his warm support to movements in connection with this ecclesiastical body'. In fact in 1899, the Rector had pursued extension of the 1892 Talbot Hobbs designed church by adding a further twenty feet of building at the western end, and by the addition of ten feet wide side aisles, all designed by Powell. Consecration of the extended church took place in 1902. The extensions at the western end included a timber framed and weatherboard clad section to allow for future expansion. Also in 1902, a well known wood carver was commissioned to work on the pulpit and matching lectern designed by Powell. In June 1938, to alleviate accommodation shortages and general defects, a contract was let for another extension to Christ Church, once again planned by Powell. This work included vestry, porch and bell tower additions to the west end of the church in limestone masonry to match the original structure.

Despite Depression years, the firm's growth continued when they became Powell, Cameron & Chisholm in 1930. Oswald (Ossie) Victor Chisholm (1903-1989) joined as a partner, followed in turn by Alex Cameron's son Alexander Kenneth (Ken) Cameron (1909-1967) in 1934. Commercially successful, Powell's firm made a significant contribution to architecture in the State, although his primary design influence is difficult to distinguish from the overall works of the practice(s). He was an influential partner in the firm that has continued into the twenty-first century as Cameron Chisholm & Nicol.



Mortlock Bros Ltd 1016 Hay Street Perth of 1933 (Google Maps 2015)



Western end of Christ Church Claremont of 1938 (Google Maps 2015)

Thomas Powell died at his Perth city office aged 81 years on 1 May 1946, and was buried in the Anglican section at Karrakatta Cemetery. Helen predeceased him by two years, and at his death Thomas left three daughters, Rita Harden of Melbourne, Gwen and Brenda of 85 Bay View Terrace, Claremont.

References:

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- 'Tenders', *Argus*, 13 August 1890, p.3, (Kauri seating Wesleyan Church North Carlton, alts residence Davis Street Elsternwick for J.E. Frank).
- 'Marriages: Powell - Powell', *Australasian*, 5 May 1894, p.41 (marriage at Camberwell).
- 'News and Notes', *The West Australian*, 29 April 1902, p.4 (pulpit for Christ Church Claremont).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 4 May 1903, p.3 (villa Barker Rd Subiaco for Mrs C. MacNish).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 13 October 1903, p.2 (villa Wood St Claremont for Mrs H. Jones).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 24 September 1904, p.2 (villa Saladin Street Claremont).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 18 May 1905, p.2 (villa Notre Dame [Langsford] St Claremont).
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- 'Personographs - He Knows Where to Draw the Line', *Truth*, 15 January 1927, p.4.
- 'Personal', *The West Australian*, 11 January 1930, p.18 (Chisholm joins Powell and Cameron).
- 'New Motor Building', *The West Australian*, 4 May 1933, p.4 (Mortlock's Building Hay Street).
- 'City Architect Dies Suddenly', *Daily News*, 1 May 1946, p.9 (death at office).
- 'Obituary', *Building & Construction*, 3 May 1946, p.2.
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