



Bill Durack in later years (*The West Australian*, 5 October 2010, p.43.)

William Aiden Durack (1918-2010) was born at 'Bimera' in Goldsmith Road Claremont on 9 December 1918, the second youngest of six children to renowned Kimberley Region pastoralists Michael Patrick and Ida 'Bessie' (nee Johnstone) Durack. Of the four sons and two daughters, Reginald Wyndham Durack (1911-1998) was a prominent pastoralist in the Northern Territory, Dame Mary Durack Miller (1913-1994) gained distinction as an author, Elizabeth Durack Clancy (1915-2000) was a gifted painter, Kimberley Michael Durack (1917-1968) was a pioneer of agriculture in the Kimberley Region, and David Johnstone Durack (1920-1982) was a highly successful civil engineer.

Young Bill was schooled at Christian Brothers College, Perth during 1925-1936. He commenced four years of articulated studies under architect Michael Cavanagh (1860-1941), and was a member of the largely student body, the Architectural Association of WA in 1937. Bill completed his articles in 1940 and Cavanagh suggested that he might become his partner in the practice. However the Second World War (1939-1945) intervened and the plans faded. Bill sat for the Architects Board of West Australia exams, was admitted as a member of the Royal Institute of Architects of West Australia (RIAWA) before it joined the national body, and later became an Associate of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects. During his apprenticeship with Cavanagh Bill gained the highest student honour and was awarded the RIAWA Bronze Medal (E.G. Cohen Medal) in 1940.

Bill left for the Eastern States in early 1941 to further advance his architectural education and experiences. His first job in Sydney was with the well-known hospital architects Stephenson and Turner, and later with Robertson and Marks. This was followed by a longer spell with the firm Rudder Littlemore & Rudder.

After nearly a year in Sydney, in early 1942 Bill made a fairly sudden departure to join his brother Kim on the Ord River at a location known as Carlton Reach, now the site of the flourishing WA township of Kununurra. Kim had just set up the first research station to be established in the Kimberleys and, because of the wartime conditions then existing, he was desperately in need of assistance in his marathon efforts to show what could be done with irrigation and to change the pattern of development in the north of WA. It was an extraordinary change from Bill's life as a professional man in Sydney. Kim's (and Bill's) efforts eventually led directly to the construction of the Ord River High Dam and creation of Lake Argyle.



Bill Durack with his father Michael Patrick (MP) in early fodder crop at Carlton Reach Research Station in 1942 (Kimberley History Society Museum Kununurra)

In late 1944, Bill returned to Perth as the research station had largely overcome the earlier difficulties and was moving towards another stage of development, with CSIRO becoming involved and the beginnings of Federal as well as State Government support. This was prior to the building of the Diversion Dam in 1963, and completion of the High Dam to form the mighty Lake Argyle in 1972.

On Bill's return to Perth in 1944 he was employed as an architect with the WA Public Works Department in a very different capacity to his recent activities with brother Kim. Bill had corresponded with Noni Braham of Bathurst during his three years in the Kimberley, and proposed by letter to this 'very beautiful and talented young woman' whom he had first met on Christmas Day in Sydney during 1941. Following the proposal she came to Perth on 'VP' day in August 1945, and they were married at St Mary's Cathedral in September 1945.



Qantas House, designed by Rudder Littlemore & Rudder and built in 1950 at 1 Chifley Square Sydney (Darren Bradley photo, Docomomo Australia)

A short time after the marriage the couple returned to Sydney, and Bill was again employed as an architect with Rudder Littlemore & Rudder. The firm had a very extensive and varied practice, and were then engaged as architects for Qantas Empire Airways, who were expanding after the Second World War (1939-1945) with flights to London. They were active in New Guinea, and Bill made frequent visits there to supervise building works in remote locations. Darwin was the main Qantas maintenance base for London flights, and Bill also made many trips there to organise extensive building works and infrastructure. About the same time the multi-storey Qantas Head Office was built at 1 Chifley Square in the heart of Sydney, with Rudder Littlemore & Rudder the architects of the iconic building, one of the first buildings in Australia to utilise curtain walled technology.

Bill and Noni's first son John was born in Bathurst in 1946, and second son Michael followed in 1948. In 1950 a position was advertised calling for an architect-engineer for the large pastoral company known as Australian Estates, which had many properties in Western Queensland and the Gulf country. Bill gained this position and left Sydney for North Queensland in April 1950 with Noni and the two young children. His diaries of the time recount activities amongst the well-known properties - Kamileroi on the Leichhardt River, Granada close to Cloncurry, Dalgona on Julia Creek, Chatsworth on Burke River and Canobie. By coincidence the company properties also included Thylungra in Western Queensland, which had originally been pioneered by his grandfather Patsy Durack in the late 1860s.

Bill's much loved father 'MP' died in Perth in September 1950, and he made a rush trip from the Gulf to Perth to attend the funeral. It was at this time he first met the bush legend Reg Williams on a plane from Tennant Creek to Adelaide. They remained firm friends until Reg's death in Toowoomba over 50 years later. They were involved together in the concept, design and building of the Stockman's Hall of Fame at Longreach in central Queensland. Bill prepared the brief for a very successful architectural competition, and was one of the three assessors to judge the entries.

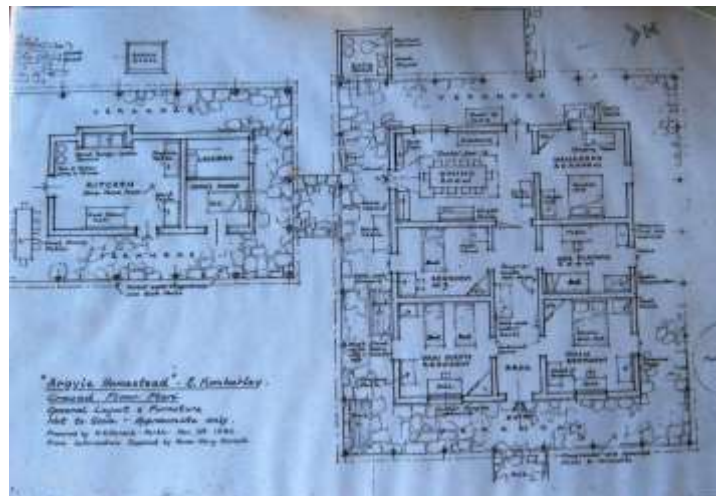
On leaving Australia Estates in November 1952, Bill and Noni and three sons moved to Toowoomba, west of Brisbane, where he immediately set up an architectural practice. He later took on two partners, Frank Brammer and Ben Stekhoven and the firm was active as Durack Brammer and Stekhoven until Bill's retirement in 1988, when the firm had to its credit the development of numerous buildings in Toowoomba and beyond.



St Patrick's Cathedral Toowoomba (Wikipedia); Jondaryan Woolshed (www.queensland.com/)

During Bill's many years in Toowoomba he became involved with its growth, and that of southern and western Queensland. There was the building of the family home at Toowoomba in 1964. His firm designed and built many houses, schools, churches, factories and shops. They also undertook restoration work - including Jondaryan Woolshed complex, St Patrick's Cathedral, Toowoomba City Hall, the Old Courthouse, and similar buildings elsewhere on the Darling Downs. Bill also designed a residence in suburban Perth at Bellevue Avenue, Dalkeith for his sister Mary Durack Miller, who wrote a number of her well-known books there. Perhaps at 12 Bellevue Avenue, as Mary's husband Horace C. Miller is listed there in *Wises Directory* from the early 1940s.

Ironically, given the efforts of Kim and Bill Durack in the 1940s and beyond, with completion of the Ord River Dam in early 1971 and the formation of Lake Argyle in 1972, the family's historic Argyle Downs Homestead was dismantled stone by stone, stored in Kununurra, and rebuilt towards the end of the decade, 15km from its original position. In 1979 the building was re-opened as a museum.



Floor plan of Argyle Homestead drawn by Bill Durack in 1984 from information supplied by Dame Mary Durack (photo of drawing at Argyle Homestead Museum, John Taylor 2003).

Built by 'Patsy' Durack with assistance from his sons and others in 1895 on the banks of the Behn river at a time when conditions and life in Kimberley were often harsh and unpredictable, the original homestead was, for its time, spacious and comfortable with wide, shaded verandahs and breezeways throughout. The physical and human environment of Argyle was also a primary source of inspiration for Bill's sisters Mary and Elizabeth, who as young women in the 1930s, collaborated on a variety of artistic projects.



Bill Durack with sons John and Matthew at a Durack family memorial near Kununurra in 2006
(Jenny Durack, ABC Rural)

The last grandchild of the legendary pastoralist Patsy Durack to pass away, Bill Durack died in Toowoomba, Queensland on 30 September 2010, aged 91. Bill was survived by Noni and five sons, Jack William, Michael James, James Mahoney, Patrick William, and Matthew Kimberley. Along with his children's partners, he was survived by many grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

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