

Wally & Shirley Greenham in 1968 with children Perri, Kim and Susan (courtesy Perri Pires)

Wallace James Greenham (1927-2017) was born 7 April 1927 in Perth, one of seven children to parents Albert James and Emily Jane (nee Cairns) Greenham, who had married at Leederville in 1919. Wallace had siblings Jean Elinor b.1919, Sheila Emily b.1922, Murray 'George' b.1923, Thelma Mary b.1925, Margaret Agnes b.1929, and David Albert b.1932.

Albert Greenham was born in Victoria in 1897, one of a family of thirteen children. The family moved to Western Australia in 1910 and commenced farming in the north-east wheatbelt at Koorda. Emily was one of three, born of Scottish parents who migrated from Scotland in 1897 - her father was a locomotive driver stationed at Southern Cross. Following the Great Depression of the 1930s and several years of drought, Albert and Emily abandoned farming and in 1936 moved to Mandurah, where they started a general store and vegetable market garden.

'Wally' Greenham's late primary school years were spent at the Mandurah State School. Wally showed early promise, as at the 1940 Murray District 'Jubilee Show', he was the winner in the school section of the 'Original Design, Class VII'. The pressures of a large family with meagre resources led to Wally leaving home at the age of fourteen to find work. The series of jobs that followed school included making charcoal (for wartime vehicles using gas producers), firewood carting, poultry dressing, delivering milk, and working for a boat builder. At sixteen and a half years he commenced working for a pastry cook, and stayed with this trade until 1945.

The six foot, two inch tall Greenham enlisted for Second World War (1939-1945) service as an eighteen year old in June 1945, then living with his parents at Leslie Street in Mandurah. Fortunately, the war had ended by the time he had completed training. In 1946 he was stationed at Nungarin, and when discharged in early 1947, it was noted in the local press that he was returning to Mandurah on a visit with his sisters and 'waiting to take up an Army course in boatbuilding'. When the youngest brother David enlisted in the navy during 1951, the family address was given as 10 Bolton Road Mandurah. Following demobilisation, Wally again went out working as a labourer on a sawmill in the south west, and in the building trade around Perth. In 1948 he was offered post-war rehabilitation training as a wood machinist in the furniture trade.



Wallace Greenham at his enlistment in 1945 (NAA B883, WX23324)

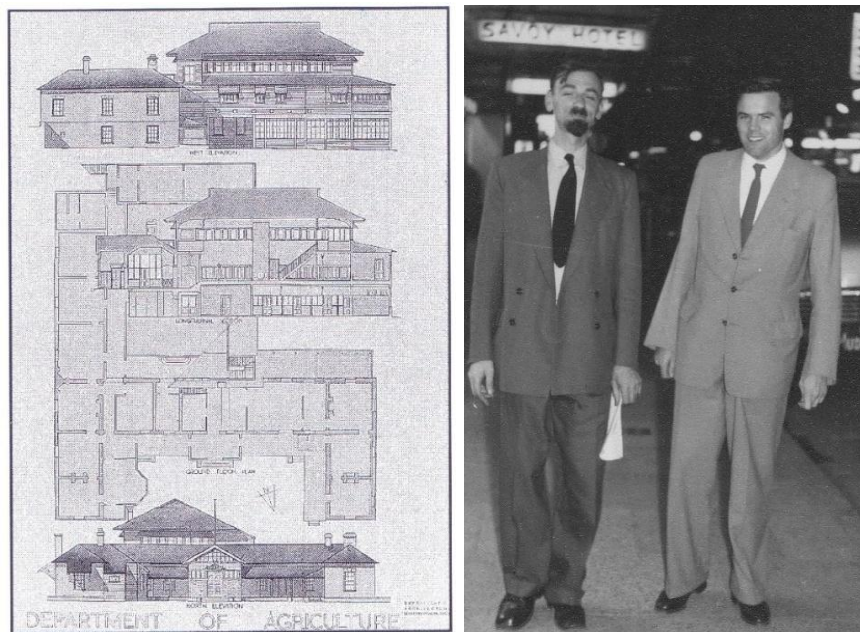
During the first years of his training as a wood machinist, Wally was living at a men's boarding house in Perth. Many of the occupants were involved in post-war rehabilitation training of various trades and professions. It was here that he first became stimulated by philosophical discussions, and the potential of learning to add meaning to life. One of the men was studying architecture, and heightened Wally's interest by lending a copy of the classic reference book - Bannister Fletcher's 'History of Architecture'.

In 1950 Wally and Shirley Martin were married, they went on to have children Kim b.1952, Susan b.1954 and Perri b.1959. Around the time of the birth of Kim, Greenham became aware of his discontent with the monotony of mass production in wood machining. He had a dormant creative energy which wasn't being expressed, and even willed himself to try and have an accident to release him from the situation. In 1953 Wally inadvertently met the prominent architect

Marshall Clifton (1903–1975), who had seen some sketches for a building that Greenham had drawn. Clifton suggested Wally should take on an architectural draughting course at night school, which he did, and met the instructor Dennis Silver (b.1929). Silver made Greenham aware of the work of an architect as compared with a draughtsman, and Wally decided to give up work, returning to fulltime study at Leederville Technical College in order to obtain his Junior and Leaving Certificates.

These achievements, and the winning of State and Federal Government Scholarships allowed Wally's entrance into the Associateship in Architecture course at Perth Technical College (PTC), under the directorship of William (Bill) H. Robertson (1905-1953). Robertson had assisted to launch the architectural course at PTC in 1946.

Greenham commenced at PTC in 1954 with a class that included future registered architects in WA: Brian Kidd (reg no. 318), David Melsom (319), Peter McComish (364), Geoff Mundy (360), John Pidgeon (327), Bill Phillips (320), Margot Smalpage-Watson (359), Bruce Tomlinson (352), and Gordon White (376). He studied for the five years 1954-1958. Bill Robertson's unexpected death in 1953 led to the appointment of a new course head, the enigmatic F. Senior Bolland in mid-1954, and this event was of great benefit to Greenham.



Greenham's measured survey drawing of the Department of Agriculture, St George's Terrace Perth, completed in second year of the architecture course - 1955 (*Visions and Voices*, p.15); F. Senior Bolland at left and Ed Whitaker – a 1951 graduate of PTC – at right (Claire Whitaker).

In later times, Greenham recalled: *The first term of Year 1 was boring. It was what I imagined studying architecture in the nineteenth century would have been like – an excessive preoccupation with classical styles. It wasn't until the new Head of Department was appointed in second term that the course came to life. The new head, Senior Bolland, was a man with worldwide experience. Fortunately for me he survived departmental bureaucracy for the five years I was studying, and, I have always been thankful for that contact. After the first two years of study I went to work for Raymond Jones [1925-2022] in Fremantle. This was a valuable experience and was a good introduction into all aspects of an architectural practice. The last three part time years of the course flowed well with only minor interruptions on the social side of activities; as a student 10-13 years older than most, and trying to participate in what I saw as almost wild orgies, I reverted to being a loner and somewhat amazed at the turmoil of personal relationships being experienced by my fellow students. I became aware that I was the lucky one to be in a stable marriage at the time.*

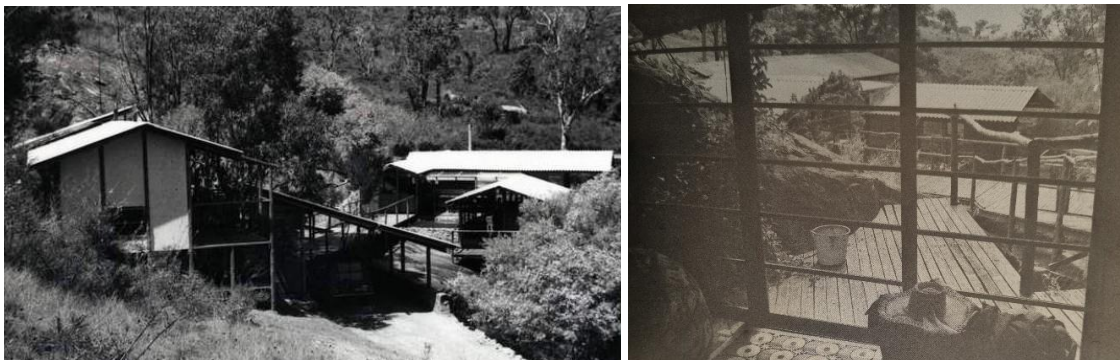
Renowned architectural historian, fellow PTC graduate and lecturer Duncan Richards (reg no 329) notes that Greenham's final year thesis was entitled *The Nature of Man* and revealed his personal design credo, an attempt to establish a fundamental basis for design that effectively met human environmental needs. The focus of the study was local and in the introduction Greenham stated that 'because the basis of living is the family unit, and because my direct physical and mental experiences have been confined to Australian conditions this thesis will relate primarily to life within the Australian home.' Greenham's other initial influences were the architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright and the traditional architecture of Japan, where he made a short study tour c.1959. In December 1958 Wally and Brian Kidd had gained £150 each as runners-up in the lucrative Morawetz Travel Prize, with the £800 first prize taken by Richards.

Following graduation Wally worked for several architects for short periods, and he later noted: *either I was sacked "he was bad influence on the students or he won't wear a coat and tie in the office" or I "sacked" them, (found my brain shrinking while working for a government department) or found it hard to accept design attitudes from conservative bosses ("design them a two storey house with columns on the front-that's what they asked for") ..."*

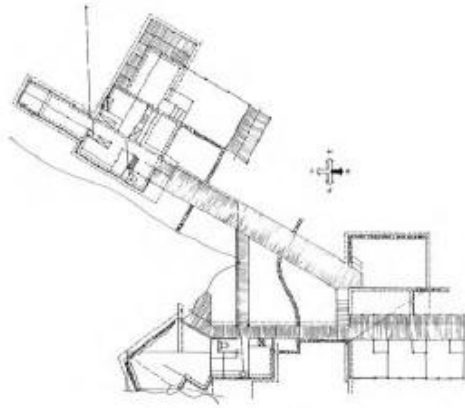


Senior Bolland and Wallace Greenham at the Department of Architecture, PTC c.1957; and Greenham teaching at PTC c.1960 (Duncan Richards, 'Western Australian Domestic Architecture and its Relationship to Landscape', *Voices*, Summer 1992-1993, p.94)

Greenham, then listed at 47 Second Avenue in Riverton, was registered (no 341) with the Architects Board of Western Australia on 12 April 1960. By the end of 1959 Greenham's second daughter had been born, and in 1960 he returned to PTC to lecture. His main involvement was in building construction and design, where he felt a strong affinity with students on a one to one basis. For Wally, it was a two-way learning process, particularly in design philosophy - constant questioning, analysis and criticism was a valuable experience for all. During the following eight years he continued lecturing, and at the same time designed several houses, mainly in the Darling Scarp area east of Perth. This included the design of an extraordinary house at Lot 175 Lewis Road, in Whistlepipe Gully at Forrestfield, which he and his 12 year-old son built over a 15 month period. During this time, the family camped on the property in a shack and a caravan; living under fairly primitive conditions and relying on a creek for water supply and electricity generation.



Views of the Greenham's remarkable Whistlepipe Gully house (*Cross-Section*, no. 170, Dec 1966; *Western Towns and Buildings*, p.145).



Plan, and exterior view of Whistlepipe Gully house (*Mythic Houses*, p.6; www.wanowandthen)

Duncan Richards remembers Greenham's teaching: *Who, these days, would recall the amazing sight and sound of a large class of building construction students (chattering away like birds in a tree) building test walls using the various forms of earth construction on the Greenham site. Those walls lasted for many years, probably long after the students had forgotten their time at Whistle Pipe Gully. Wallace loved communal things, groups of students involved in activities of which he approved, even if he once told us he was not the best person to manage such activities, too controlling, too doctrinaire.*

The Metropolitan Regional Planning Authority acquired the Greenham's property in September 1967 but allowed them to continue to occupy the house. This was an unsatisfactory arrangement and the Greenham family moved-on in the 1970s. The Forrestfield house was surreptitiously demolished in 1981, and Whistlepipe Gully is now part of the Mundy Regional Park in the Shire of Kalamunda.

In 1970 Greenham purchased 500 acres of land on the Leschenault Peninsula, north of Bunbury, for future development. The property, named *Belvidere*, eventually became a loose knit "drop-out" community for people wanting to have a go at self-sufficiency. It survived as such for about fifteen years until the local government authority placed a demolition order on the thirteen dwellings built without permits. 1972 saw the breakdown of Greenham's marriage and eventual divorce. Wally remarried in 1974 – as he described it "a fiery marriage that lasted 4 months". The following six months was spent at a spiritual community in Chidlow, a small area within the Shire of Mundaring, where he experienced first-hand both the benefits and disadvantages of communal living.

In 1975 Greenham left behind family ties, friends and house to start development of a virgin block of 24 hectares on the south coast at Denmark. Two of his older children, and subsequently, their spouses, joined him after twelve months, and together they developed the property. It consisted of seven houses or cabins, a woodworking workshop and sawmill, and functioned as a holiday resort and craft centre called "The Cove" at Payne Road in Denmark. The current website for the property notes some of the accommodation: *The Cove's 24 hectares was purchased in 1965 by Wallace and Shirley Greenham. Ten years later, Wallace moved to Demark and began construction of the A-Frame, being followed by potter Jonathon Hook, Kim Greenham, and Susan and Illya Cenin.*

The A-Frame functioned as a communal living space, and building soon began on the workshop complex which catered for woodwork, metalwork and pottery. The woodwork business "Settler's Pine", grew out of a salvage operation following Cyclone Alby in 1978.



Wally Greenham with daughter Susan and her husband Illya, and his first wife Shirley ('Bloody Hippies' movie, Youtube).

During this period Wally dabbled in land subdivision and designing several houses in the district. Other activities during this time include involvement with the arts community, environmental work and four years as a Shire of Denmark Councillor (1979-1982). He also had a hand in designing the original frail-aged section of the old Denmark District Hospital.



Greenham-designed 1980s residence in Crowea Road Denmark (realestate.com.au)

1991 saw a creative challenge come to the fore again – the development of a 52 hectare property at Normans Beach, 45 km east of Albany. A windswept coastal stretch of heathland in an isolated area, surrounded by national park and reserves - completely different to the sheltered Karri forest environment of The Cove at Denmark. The design and construction of this project was followed intensely for eight years. During this time Wally met his new wife Helen, and they moved into the new house during April 1999.



Norman's Beach dome house exterior and interior (www.wanownadthen.com; Andrew Boyne)

Architect Andrew Boyne visited Wally at the house at Normans Beach, noting the house: *is just east of Albany, and sits sandwiched between two national parks on a stretch of uninhabited coastline. With Mt Manypeaks immediately to the east, and waves breaking over rocks out to sea, the site for this house is exceptionally beautiful. The house consists of seven form concrete tubes that radiate from a large glass dome. Because the windy coastal environment is often unpleasant and made it difficult to grow a decent garden, the glass dome provided a warm comfortable space that acted somewhat like a greenhouse. ... Greenham was even able to grow a fruiting banana tree. This is down on the almost Arctic coast between Albany and Esperance. ... The dome was replaced by a polycarbonate sheet roof that protects the edges of the central courtyard from rain. The new arrangement provides adequate protection from the elements.*

In 1999 Wally commented to some of his previous PTC students: *What of the future: I am contented at this stage in the completing of details on the building and developing the garden. I have no wish to be involved in practicing architecture again except to give advice on land development or home design. Have never touched a computer keyboard and have no wish to do so. Overseas travel does not appeal any more but would like to see more of Australia.*

I have eight beautiful grandchildren, the eldest being 21, and get enjoyment from seeing each one of them going through the stages of self-realisation and development of their individuality. Fortunately there have been no major difficulties in their adjustment towards maturity at this time. At 72 years of age I must settle down. No more dreaming about the perfect relationship! No more day dreaming about the perfect living environment! Fortunately, I still enjoy good health - still have strong "hands on" creative urge. I only hope that any future creative challenge will lead to a harmonious, peaceful existence for my wife and myself and family. In the world perspective of 1999, I am optimistic, and foresee that current problems of society at a local, national and international level will be resolved and continually confronted and resolved through the advancement of technology.



Wally Greenham at approximately 75 years of age (courtesy Perri Pires).

Wally lived for around 10 years at Norman's Beach, in this time the marine environment took its toll on the dome framing, which partially collapsed, and he built a verandah all the way around inside. He designed and helped build his retirement home at Anning Road Denmark in 2006-2007. Wallace James Greenham died 14 June 2017 at Blue Wren Lodge in Denmark aged 90 years.

In the 2000s, the Australian Institute of Architects (WA) have commenced presenting a Sustainable Architecture Award named after Wallace Greenham. However, due to his generally non-metropolitan profile, Greenham is one of the less visible of the more than 120 Western Australian architects who graduated from PTC between 1950 and 1967, when the course was transferred to the Western Australian Institute of Technology. And yet he remains a legendary figure in Western Australian architectural circles, principally due to his alternative lifestyle philosophies and distinctively different hands-on 'organic' architectural design and building output. Greenham's extraordinary life and career deserves further and more detailed study in the future, perhaps at PhD and monograph level.

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