

1962: The City of Light and the Commonwealth Games

Perth Skyline from South Perth 1962
(Courtesy State Library of WA BA1103/345)

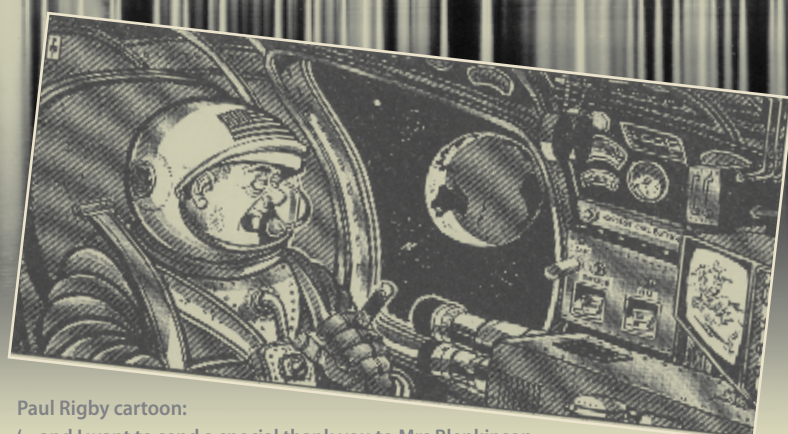
City of Light

In May 1961, President John F Kennedy declared that the United States would put an astronaut on the Moon before the end of the decade. In January 1962, NASA sent the first American to orbit the Earth aboard the spacecraft *Friendship 7*.

Perth became internationally known as the 'City of Light' when residents responded by lighting up their homes and the City of Perth left on streetlights as American astronaut John Glenn passed overhead.

Bill King, a journalist with the *West Australian*, had the original idea of lighting up the city. When approached about the idea Sir Harry Howard, Perth's Lord Mayor (1955 to 1964) had reservations and was concerned it could prove wasteful. Howard asked for time to think about the project. Unbeknown to him the journalist had also asked the Premier David Brand, who agreed with the proposal.

There was some controversy when Howard's comments were printed in the press and he was hurt by the condemnation he received over his prudent reaction. When a proposal was formally submitted to Perth City Council soon after, Howard enthusiastically supported the recommendation to illuminate parks and gardens.¹



Paul Rigby cartoon:
'...and I want to send a special thank you to Mrs Blenkinsop, 103 Willow Drive, Perth, Western Australia for the row of birthday candles she has stuck to her rotary clothes hoist'
West Australian, 1962
Courtesy West Australian Newspapers

Model of Gemini space craft
City of Perth Memorabilia
Collection no.0409



Perhaps Howard had at first underestimated the symbolic value of such an action. A *Daily News* article described the event as 'a West Australian handshake to America, a symbol of our desire to contribute in a small way, to the success of the historic space flight...'²

The proposition resonated with Perth people who identified with the sense of isolation that could be experienced by the astronaut.

On February 20 1962, Glenn circled the Earth three times, passing over the Perth area at 11.37 pm, 1.20 am and 3.00am.

Glenn was reported as saying "I can see lights on the ground. I can see the lights of Perth on the coast".³

City of Light



Gas Flare
BP magazine February 1962

Many of the 380,000 residents of Perth found ways to 'turn on the lights' for Glenn. The BP Refinery in Kwinana made a special effort to turn up their gas flare for the occasion. The flare, nearly 60 feet long and an estimated 80 times its normal brilliancy, was visible 100 miles south of Bunbury.

The tag 'City of Light' and the support for the astronaut by Perth people engendered great publicity in the USA. In February the *New York American Journal* invited the Lord Mayor and Mrs Howard to New York to take part in a ticker-tape parade to welcome back John Glenn. Despite some public attacks, calling his actions 'hypocritical', Sir Harry and Mrs Howard attended and Howard proudly wore his Lord Mayoral regalia.

The 'City of Light' idea was so successful in promoting Perth it naturally became part of marketing strategies to promote the British Empire and Commonwealth Games held later in 1962.



Lord Mayor Harry Howard shows Miss Australia, Miss Tania Verstak, a photo of John Glenn, the *West Australian* 9.5.1962.



1962 British Empire and Commonwealth Games

From 22 November–1 December 1962 Western Australia hosted the VIIIth British Empire and Commonwealth Games (the Games).

Adelaide had initially been suggested to host the Games but In 1956 Perth's Lord Mayor Harry Howard and Town Clerk WA McInnes Green, made an aggressive bid for the 1962 Games to be held in Perth.

Howard could see staging the Games was an opportunity to create a regional identity: 'a community exercise in which Perth, prone to be deprecatory about itself, could find its true stature.'⁴ This was a chance for Perth to rise to the challenge and shine, representing Australia in the eyes of the world.

On a practical level it would also provide sporting facilities that looked beyond the Games, to future generations needs. It was McInnes Green's confidence that the City could build new state-of-the-art sporting venues – a stadium, a swimming pool and a residential village – that made Perth's bid for the 1962 Games successful. As engineer, architect and administrator, McInnes Green took a leading role in marshalling the City's resources, in co-ordinating and supervising the works programme, and in designing Perry Lakes Stadium and the Beatty Park Aquatic Centre.

Howard was knighted in June 1961 for his work in securing the Games and played a energetic role as Chairman of the Games Organizing Council. More than 200 Western Australians on 19 committees worked voluntarily for the Games in the three and a half years it took to organise. Many thousands more helped during the Games.

The Fundraising Committee had the challenge of raising the estimated £405,000 required for the Games. They achieved their target. Local business and Industry were big donors giving cash and in-kind support. Ticket sales exceeded £276,460, considerably more than the Cardiff Games in 1958.



The Australian women's 4 x 110 yards freestyle relay team, left Dawn Fraser, Robyn Thorn, Ruth Everuss and Lyn Bell, wearing Victory medals

(Courtesy State Library of WA 257148PD)



Part of the humour of the closing ceremony was the hats the competitors wore. This Welshman covered his head and face with a wastepaper basket

(Courtesy State Library of WA 257599PD)

Publicity and Promotion

From the beginning it was necessary to 'sell' Perth and WA, along with the Games. The State's biggest advertising campaign was launched.

The Art Department of the *West Australian* worked full-time for 2 years on Games promotional material, providing more than £20,000 worth of publicity services. Staff artist Cedric Baxter designed the official Games poster as well as other promotional graphics.

The new medium of television, launched in Australia in 1956, played a pivotal role in the success of the 1962 Games. A Press Centre was created at Perry Lakes Stadium incorporating TV and radio requirements. The two TV stations operating in WA at the time, ABW2 and TVW7, shared rights for direct telecasts of events.

Volunteers met every incoming plane, train, ship and car to give visitors a personal welcome. Transcontinental motorists were guided across the Eyre Highway. A 'home hospitality' scheme was launched asking private householders to make rooms available for Games visitors.

Local Motor firms generously supplied 103 vehicles for a car pool to service all official games transport. 169 Lady Drivers, recruited for the car pool, volunteered more than 18,000 hours over the Games period.



Games village house, 294 The Boulevard, City Beach

(Courtesy State Library of WA 011584D)

Lady driver in official Games uniform and Volkswagen Kombi with special registration plates

Port of Fremantle magazine, Spring 1962, photo Ray Irvin



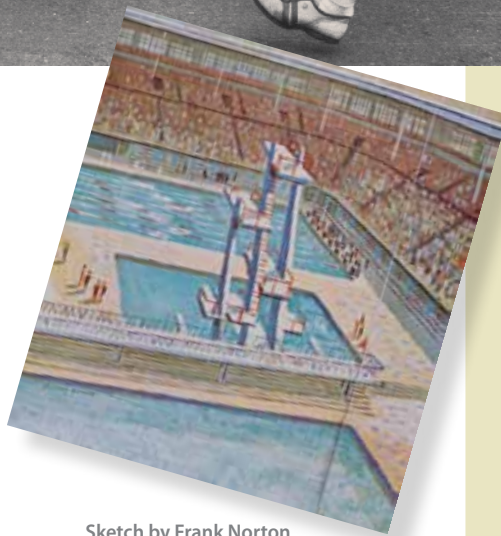
England's Brian Kilby running the marathon at the 1962 Games where he went on to win gold.

(Courtesy State Library of WA 257436PD)



Diving at the 1962 British Empire and Commonwealth Games, Perth.

(Courtesy State Library of WA 257174PD)



Sketch by Frank Norton of the Beatty Park Swimming complex Perry Lakes Stadium

Main Venues

In May 1959 Perth City Council gave the Government of Western Australia 76 acres of land near Floreat Beach, for a Games Village. The Federal Government provided a loan to finance construction and in 1960 a competition was held to design the Village. Forty West Australian architects entered a second competition to design 150 individual houses. After the Games these houses sold for between £4,900 and £6,785.

Howard's original vision for the building of an Olympic Pool in Kings Park bushland caused huge community debate. Two attempts to carry legislation permitting the pool failed, and to Howard's irritation he was nicknamed 'Pip' (Pool in the Park).⁵ The City of Perth finally built the Aquatic Centre within Beatty Park in Leederville. McInnes Green designed the modern Olympic size pool.

The Army, Navy and Air Force played a crucial role in the Opening and Closing ceremonies, contributing more than 30,000 service man-days.

The Games were opened by the Duke of Edinburgh, and despite the scorching heat (103.9 degrees – the hottest



Paddy Costello 1955 and 2010

The Perth City Council owned the 'swampy' land that became the Perry Lakes stadium complex. Paddy Costello, a young Irish migrant who joined the Council as a machine driver in 1960 was given the job of clearing the land for Beatty Park, the Games Village and Perry Lakes. So that the work would be completed on time, Costello sacrificed time with his young family and worked 12 hour days, 7 days a week for 2 years. Costello felt proud to build Perry Lakes and is sad to see it in the process of being pulled down. The Games, he said 'made' Perth – Perth jumped ahead 10 years!⁶

November day in Perth for 49 years) and 50 bush-fires raging in the metropolitan area, a crowd of 50,000 people attended. A youth Welcome demonstration involved 7,000 students.

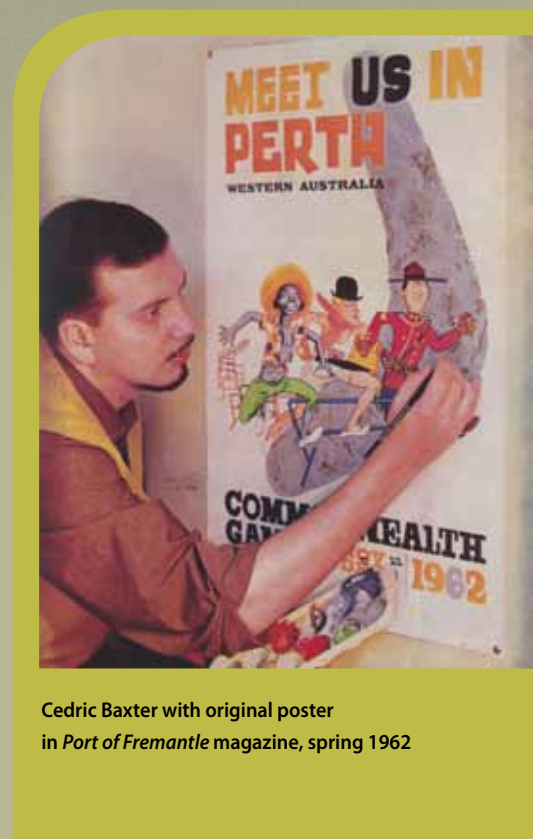
For the Closing ceremony a carnival atmosphere was struck when the Royal Australian Naval Band marched into the arena playing 'Five Feet Two, Eyes of Blue'. Athletes of all nations marched informally and a spontaneous serenade of 'Waltzing Matilda' brought athletes and spectators alike to tears.



Australia's Percy Hobson clears the bar at 6ft11in, to win the high jump gold medal, 1962

(Courtesy State Library of WA BA1103/335)

The official *VIIth Games Guide* made no mention of Aboriginal culture or history and advertisements within it presented clichés that showed there was limited understanding and respect for Aboriginal people. Apartheid was only considered briefly as an issue during the Games and race issues were barely mentioned in the press.⁷ Despite this Aboriginal athletes represented Australia for the first time in international competition at the Perth Games and Jeff Dynevor and Percy Hobson became Australia's first Aborigines to win Commonwealth Games Gold medals.



Cedric Baxter with original poster in *Port of Fremantle* magazine, spring 1962

¹ Lord Mayor Sir Harry Howard, 'Lights of Perth', report, March 1962, PCC File No 166/65, SROWA, AN 20/5, Acc.3054, 1965.

² *Daily News*, 25 January 1962 (final edition)

³ *BP Magazine*, inside cover article, February 1962

⁴ Organising Council, *Official History of the VII British Empire and Commonwealth Games*, Perth Australia 1962, Mercantile Press, Fremantle, WA, p. 9.

⁵ J. Gregory, *City of Light: A History of Perth since the 1950s*, City of Perth, 2003, p. 85.

⁶ From an interview with curator 10.6.2011

⁷ Perth Games Page, *the West Australian*, 22.11.1962



The team from Ghana marches into Perry Lakes Stadium at the Opening ceremony.

(Courtesy State Library of WA 257462PD)

Acknowledgements:

The exhibition *1962: The City of Light and the Commonwealth Games* was displayed at the Perth Town Hall, 20 October – 20 November 2011.

The City of Perth aims to make the history of the city of Perth a living history and show the role of the Council in contributing to the cultural life of the city. Thank you to the Arts and Cultural Development staff, Community Services Unit and Local Studies, City of Perth Library.

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