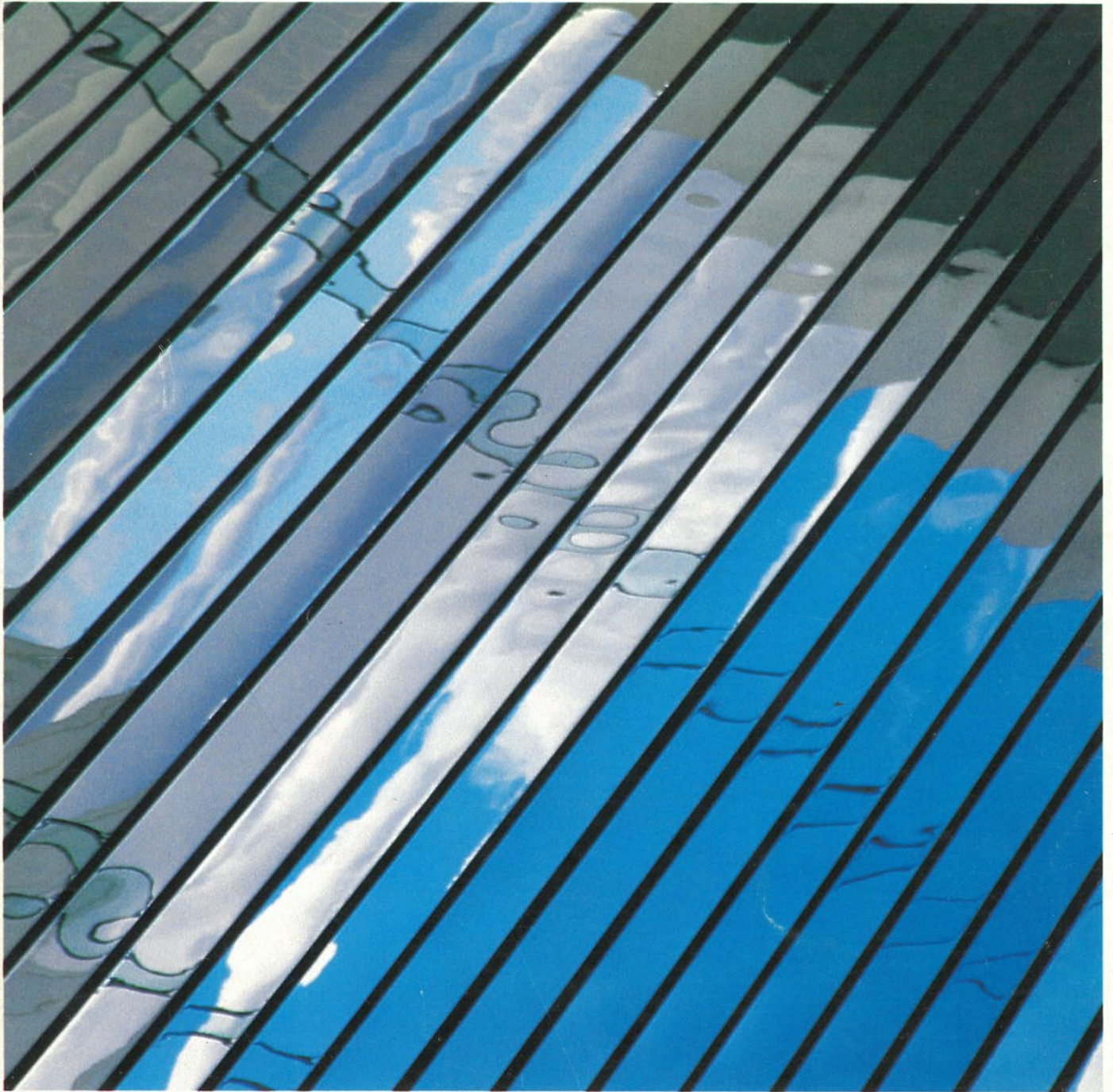


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100 years of history

Ross Donaldson

Today's partnership of Cameron Chisholm & Nicol is the culmination of a practice operating continuously in Perth since 1884. These 100 years have seen the production of many significant buildings and the period since the 1950's when Gil Nicol and Ross Chisholm came together has been quite exceptional judged by the sheer volume, variety and the quality of the work.

A Mr J W Wright established his office in Perth in 1884 and was at that time the only architect in private practice in the town. Wright, an Englishman from Middlesex, had first arrived in Australia in 1876 and worked in Adelaide undertaking the civil works of the Nairne Railway Bridge and the first sections of the Adelaide main sewer. He settled in Perth after a brief return to Europe in 1880 and after securing the contract for the construction of the second section of the Eastern Railway in Western Australia. The first recorded architectural commission was Woodbridge House in Guildford for a Mr Charles Harper. The house, now registered by the National Trust is a curious blend of early colonial from the 1840's and 1850's mixed with elements like the entry tower not unlike those being built in Toorak in the 1870's. In 1886 Mr Wright built the National Bank of Australasia on the same site redeveloped by Cameron Chisholm & Nicol for the same bank nearly ninety years later. In 1887 he built the original AMP Building on the site presently occupied by the third generation AMP. In 1895 the enterprising Mr Wright was confronted with a problem now so familiar to architects, the submitted tenders for his Federal Hotel in West Perth were altogether too high. His solution would today be considered novel. He secured the necessary skilled labour through his contacts in Adelaide and the building was erected (within budget) by day labour under his supervision. Another familiar component of Wright's work before the turn of the century was the propagation of work through his undertaking planning studies for the WA Cricket Association Ground and the Ascot Race Course for the WA Turf Club. These studies led to a number of commissions for buildings at the grounds and later to studies for the WA Trotting Association course and hence more commissions. This period, in the height of the gold rush days, also saw the great hotel building boom. Wright was part of that boom and in fact Wright was



Woodbridge House circa 1900



National Bank

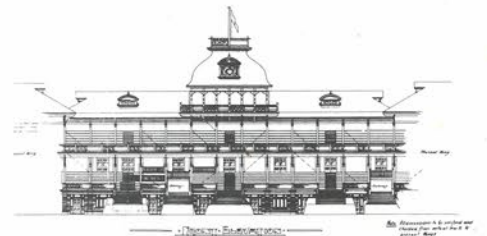
Fritz Kos



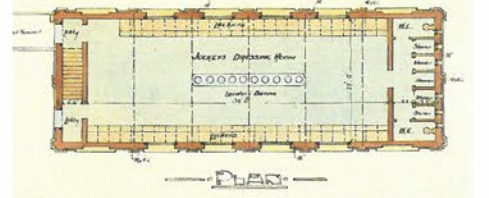
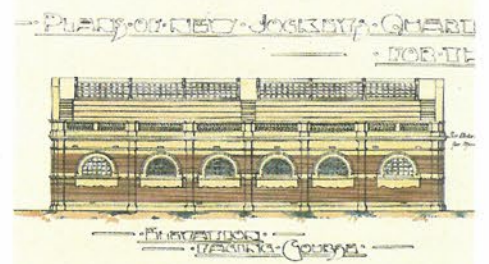
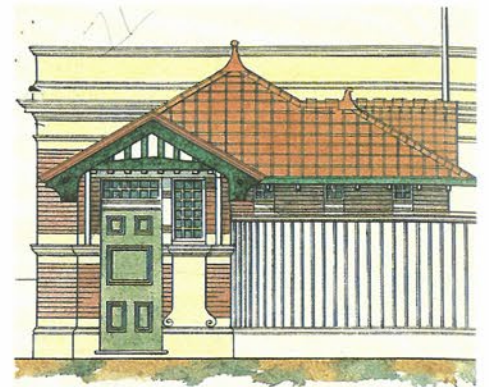
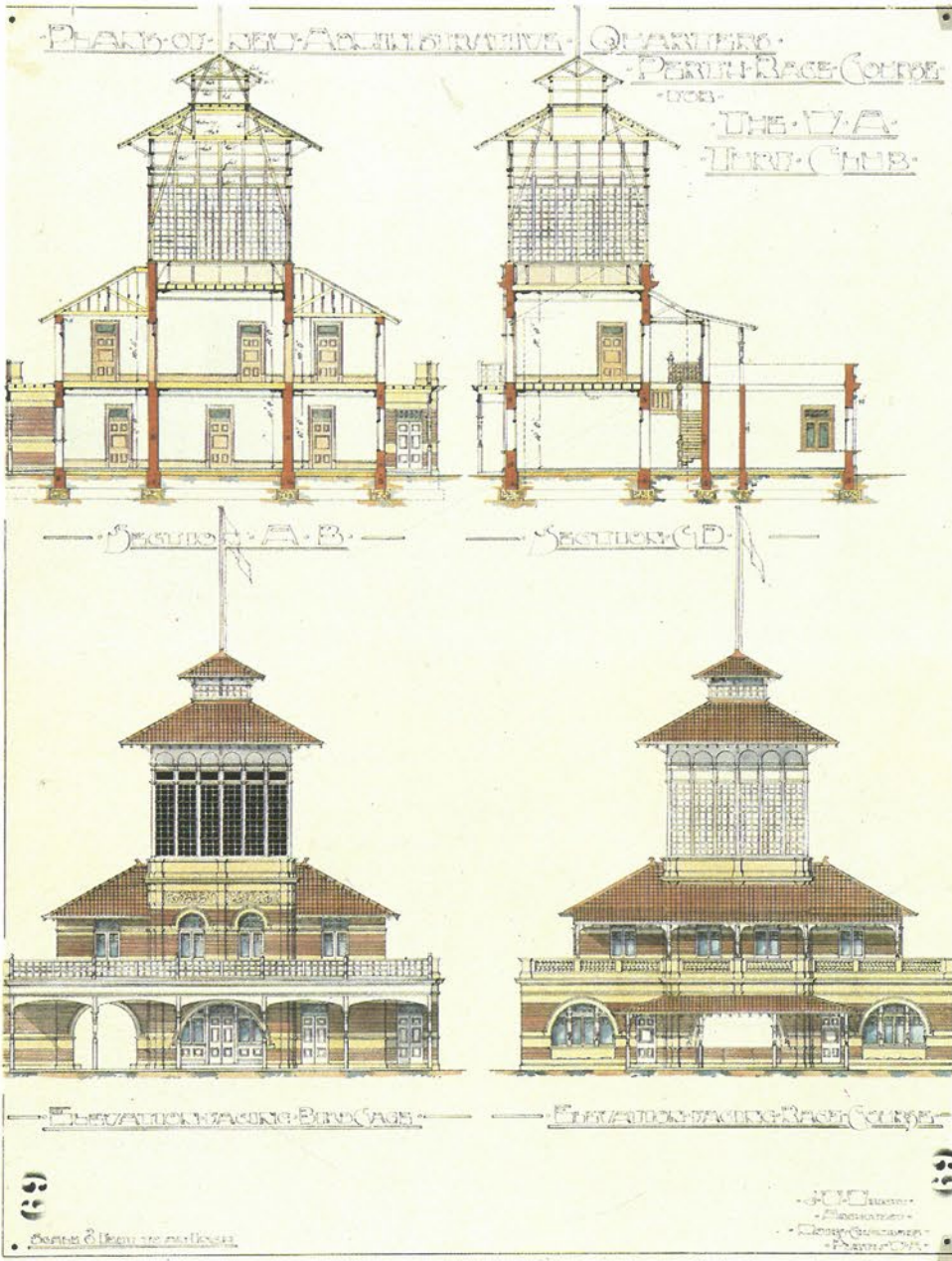
City Centre Development



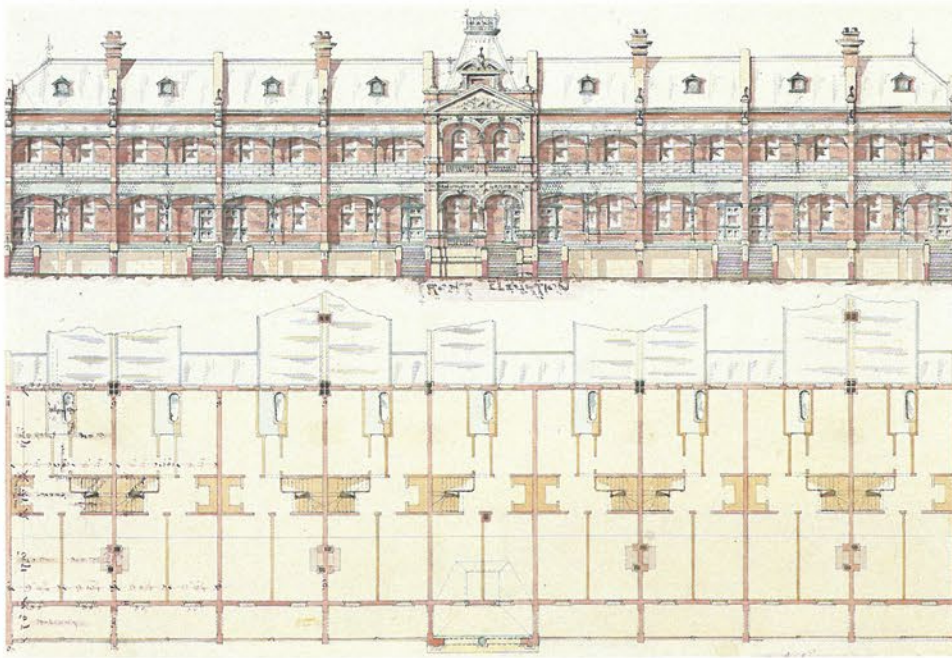
WACA Ground



WATC Grandstand



Cameron Chisholm & Nicol



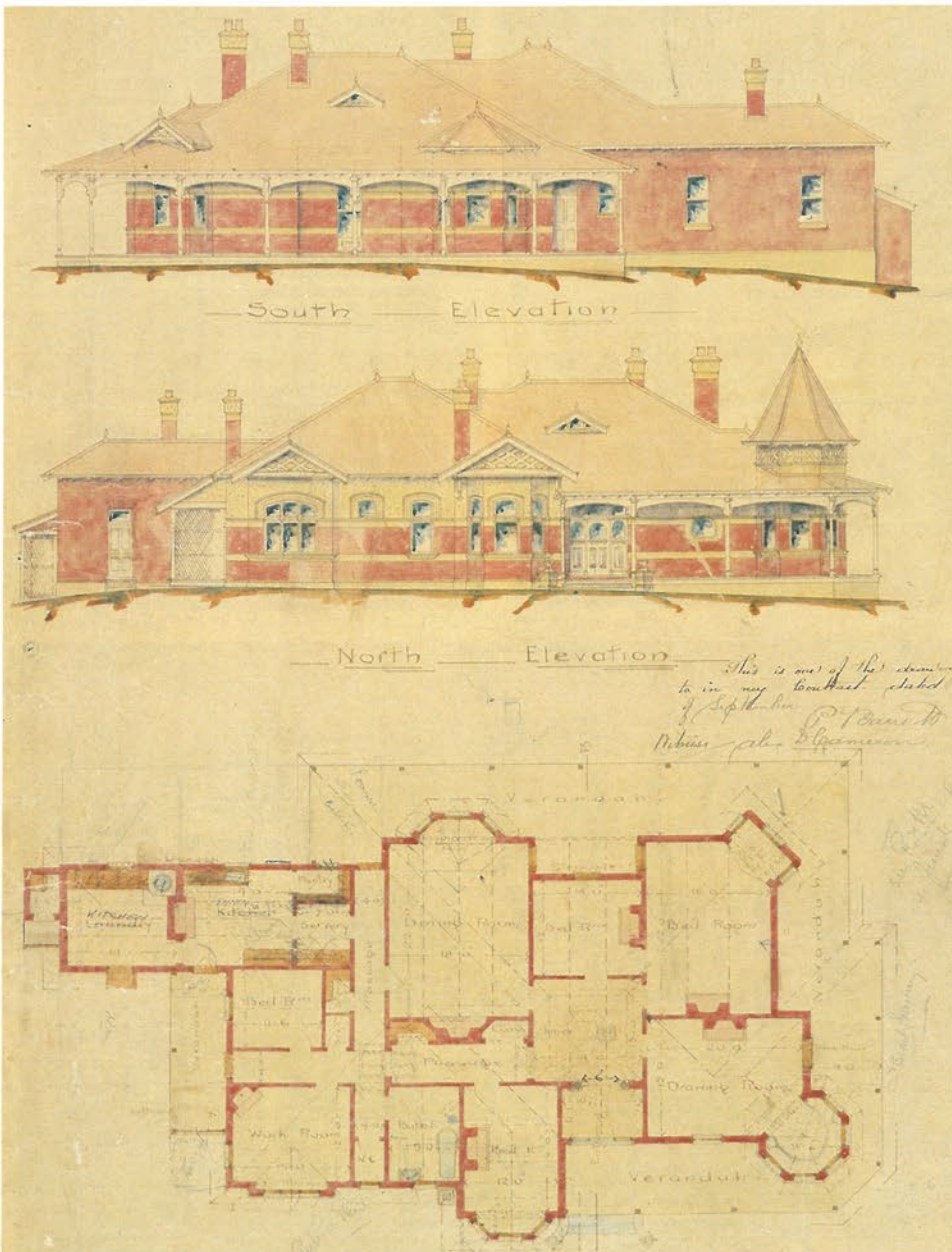
part of the gold rush history as a member of the syndicate credited with the discovery of the Eastern Goldfields in 1887. After the turn of the century a group of nine Terrace Houses were built in 1902 on Hay Street, Perth, the effects of the gold rush leading to general development of the city.

The firm's name became Wright, Powell & Cameron when in 1906 Messrs T. W. L. Powell and A. D. Cameron were admitted as partners. During this period and up until about 1910 all of the engineering and architectural works at the Ascot Race Course and WACA were completed. The Ascot Grandstand was late Victorian in virtually all its detailing including the cast iron and the tower which is very similar in form to one atop the Palace Hotel built in 1895. The other buildings at Ascot such as the Jockeys Quarters and the Public Enclosure were a flamboyant mixture of many styles and periods.

A new Town Hall for York completed in 1911 was the result of a competition. Competition successes were to become a feature of the Nicol & Chisholm partnership many years later.

In 1916 Wright died and the name was changed to simply Powell & Cameron. The period through to 1920 was not intensive in building due to the Great War. Projects completed included two large residences, one for Mr Lewis Cockram in Lawley Crescent, Mount Lawley and the other for a Dr Tregonning at the corner of Stirling Highway and Freshwater Parade in Claremont.

Another interesting commission was for Mr Albany Bell. Mr Bell owned a chain of tearooms throughout Perth known as Albany Bell's. They were efficient little shops with girls serving dressed in the uniform of a parlour maid to a high class family. The whole atmosphere was an allusion to better society and aristocracy. The building commissioned by Mr Bell in Guilford Road, Mount Lawley, was the confectionary and pastrycook's factory serving the tearooms. The imagery chosen by the architects was in keeping with that promoted by Albany Bell's and could in one sense be seen as an early form of crass commercialism – alternatively it is an amusing folly. But it was not alone in Perth at that time. The Red Castle Brewery built in the 1890's, although more classical, consisted of very similar imagery. This site is now occupied by a motel with a red brick replica tower atop and it really is crass.



Mt Lawley Residence

Cameron Chisholm & Nicol

In the decade 1921-30 the site works for the Trotting Association were carried out. Powell and Cameron also designing the main entrance gates and totalisator. Between 1921 and 1925 all the cottages at Fairbridge Farm School were built. The first were of pise-de-terre but as today this method proved to be more expensive than normal construction and the remainder were built of timber.

The firm maintained its level of activity in spite of difficult times and in 1930 Mr "Ossie" Chisholm was admitted as a junior partner followed by Mr A K Cameron in 1934.

The period between the wars was a time of laissez-faire with regard to architectural style. There was some upgrading of buildings to a more contemporary image and there was some variation determined according to function. A tremendous variety of images were produced. The Trotting Association Entrance at Gloucester Park mentioned earlier was built in 1929 emulating late-Victorian, even to the point of the lettering on the drawing. Only the high waisted doors indicated it was post-War. The Methodist Church in Mount Lawley was quite conventional in its form and the Christ Church addition is a kind of low slung English Gothic with an almost domestic entrance somewhat reminiscent of Albany Bell's. The Australian Natives Association addition of 1939 shows a three storey Mannerist building of the late nineteenth century being upgraded to a five storey Moderne exercise with only the window and door openings remaining unchanged. The 1938 South Perth House for the Misses Hassell was like many similar houses at the time in Perth and clearly indicated that the English influence had remained as strong as ever and it maintained the tradition that Perth follow on fifteen to twenty years behind.

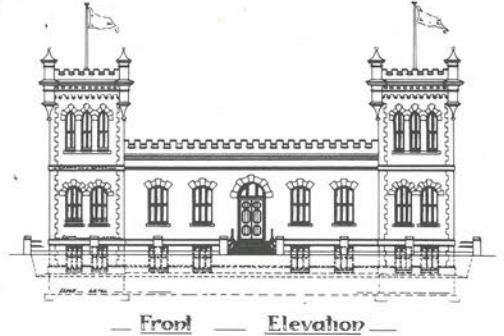
Mr Powell died in 1947 leaving the firm as Cameron & Chisholm until Gil Nicol's partnership in 1952 made it Cameron, Chisholm & Nicol.

After the second World War and into the early 50's there was obviously a different sensibility operating, creating an environment within the firm positively receptive to ideas brought back from England by the young graduates (Nicol returning in 1952 and Chisholm junior in 1958). The Dalkeith Theatre and Wentworth Motors were projects dating from 1953 and both exhibit a completely new vocabulary: the clear separation and articulation of roof, wall and window openings; a strong tendency towards a minimalism of form and texture, although this would not be fully achieved

— Proposed Additions to Works —
— Perth Guildford Road —
— Mount Lawley —
— For —
— Albany Bell Ltd —



Elevation to Thirlmere Road
Albany Bell Ltd

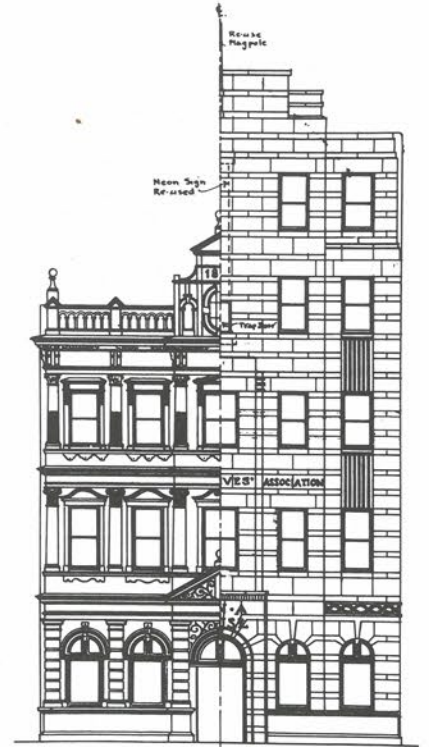
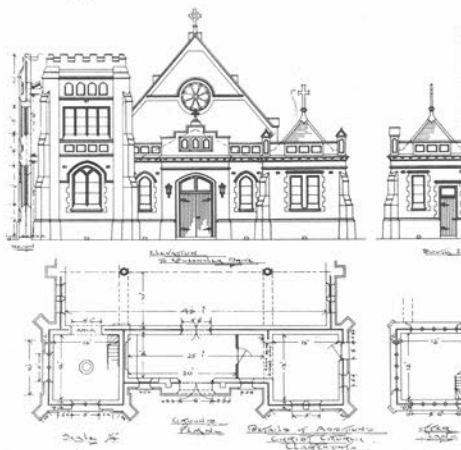


Front Elevation

Hans Verstuis



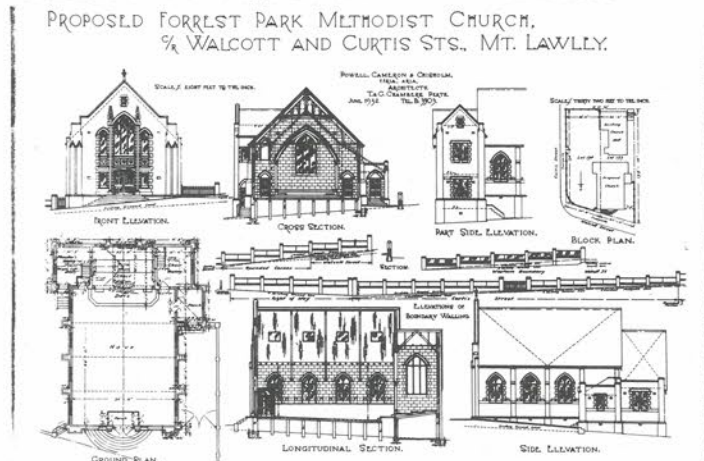
Fairbridge Farm School



FRONT ELEVATION.
GROUND FLOOR PLAN.
EXISTING | PROPOSED.

Additions to Christ Church, Claremont

ANA House



Methodist Church, Mt Lawley

Cameron Chisholm & Nicol



Wentworth Motors



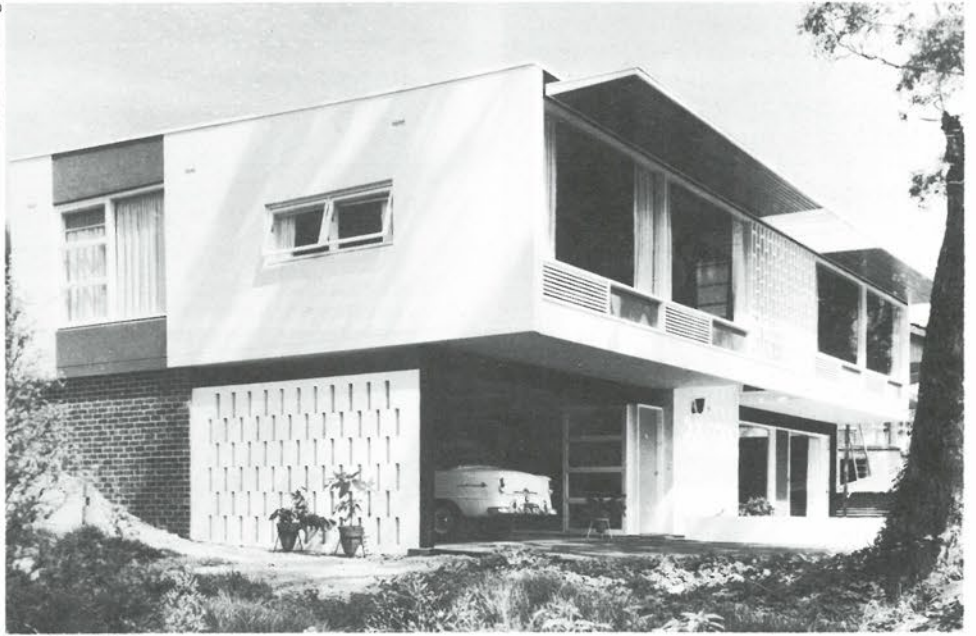
Dalkeith Theatre



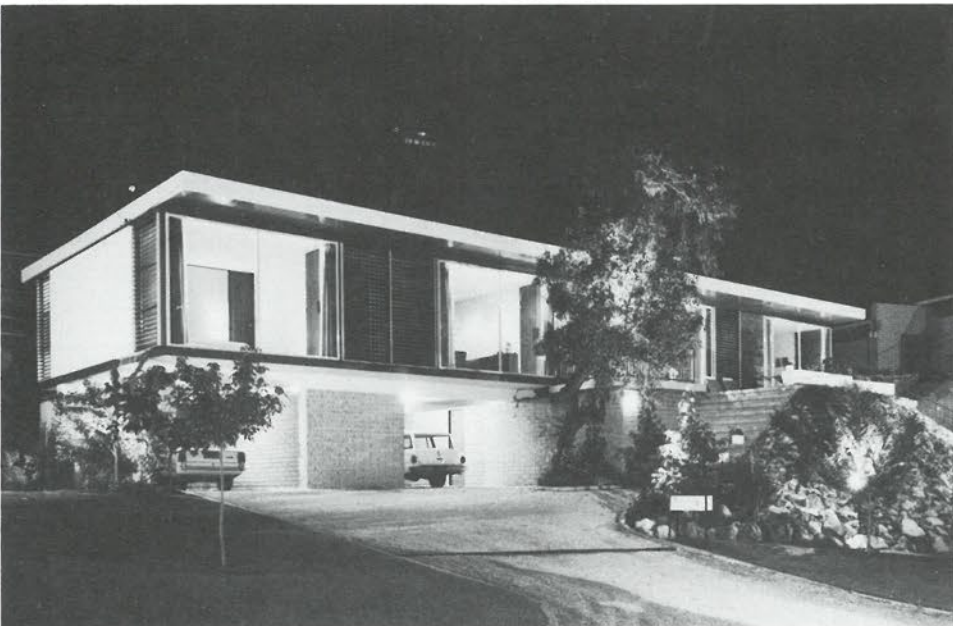
Metro Motors



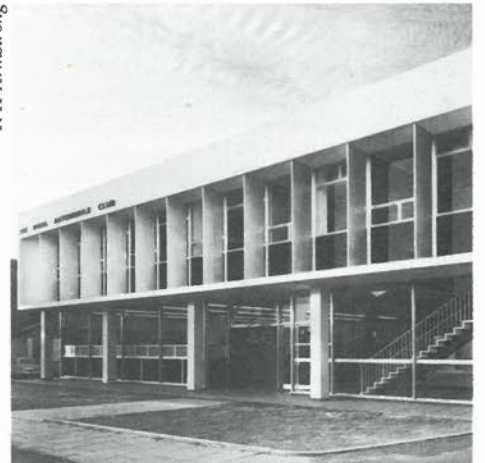
Philips Building



Nicol Residence



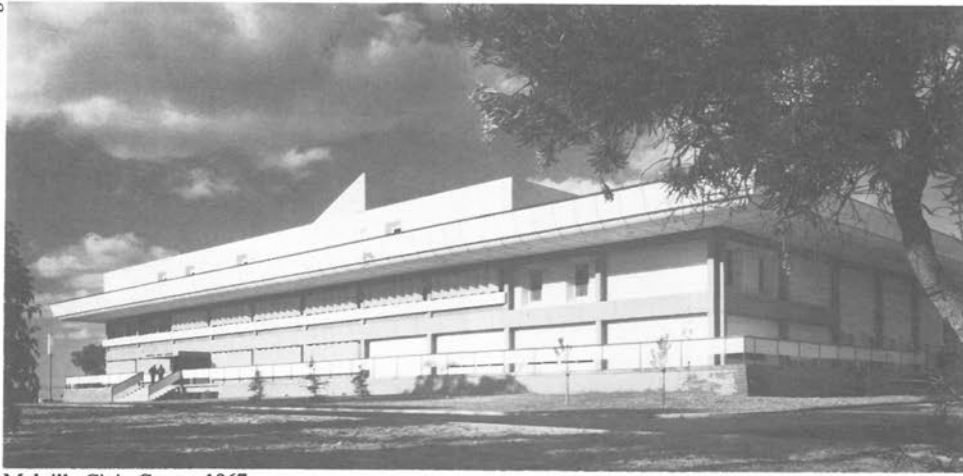
Chisholm Residence



RAC Building

Cameron Chisholm & Nicol

R H Armstrong



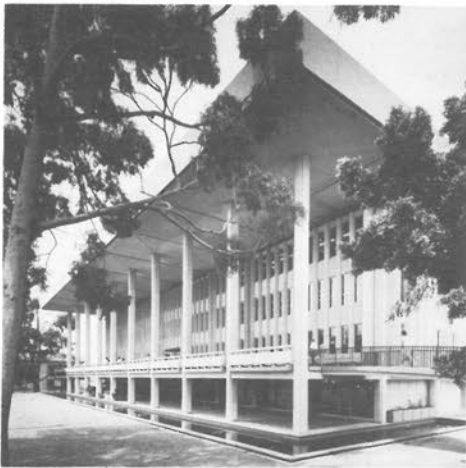
Melville Civic Centre 1967

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Wesley Chapel 1961

Fritz Kos



Reid Library

Fritz Kos



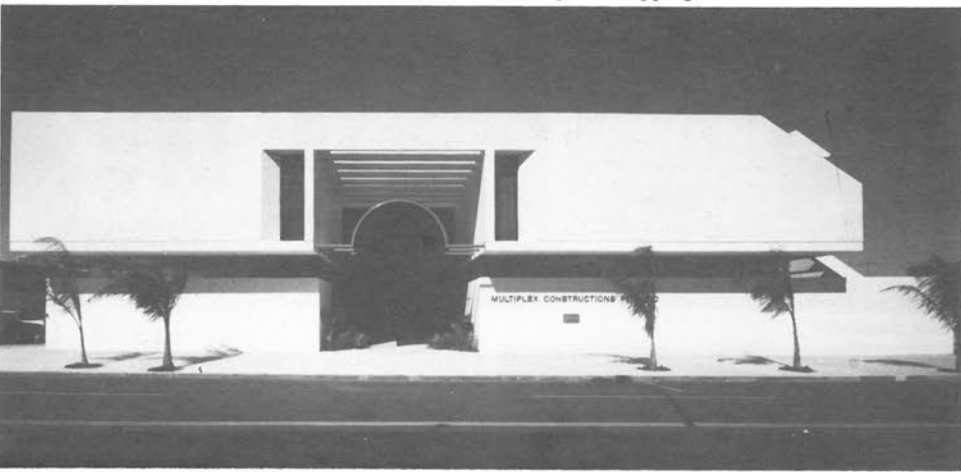
Booragoon Shopping Centre 1972

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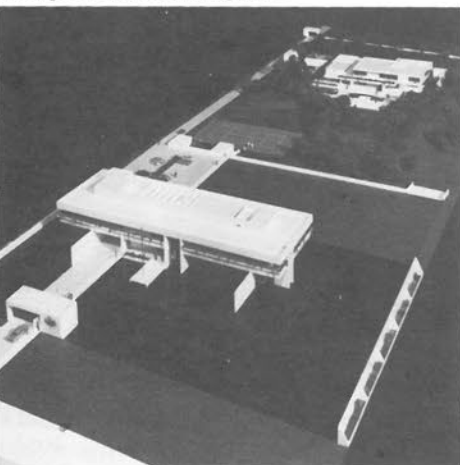
Allendale Square, Royal Insurance 1976

Fritz Kos



Multiplex Office Building 1980

Fritz Kos



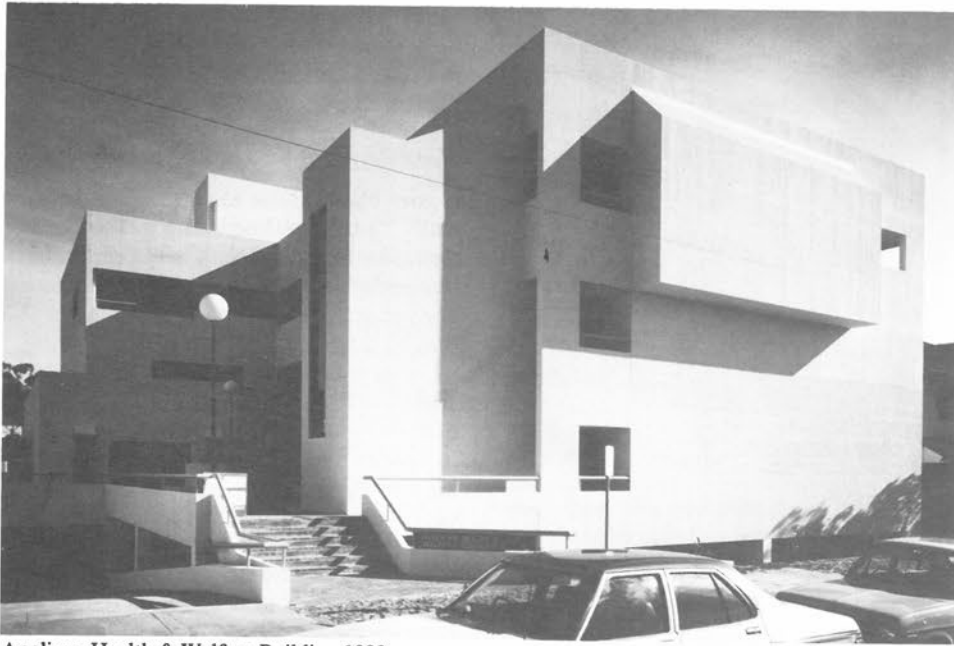
Brazilia Chancery 1974

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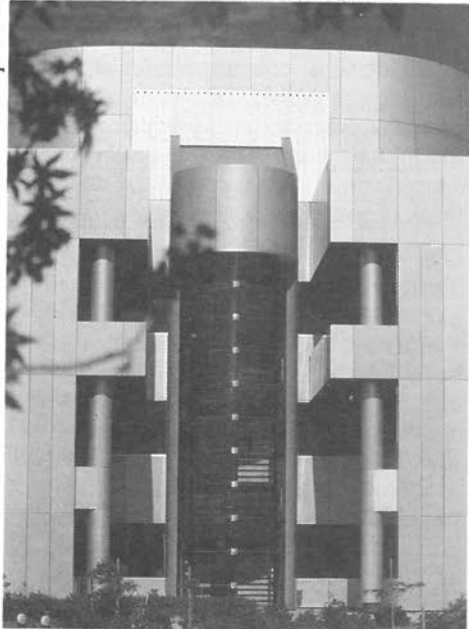


Forests Department 1981

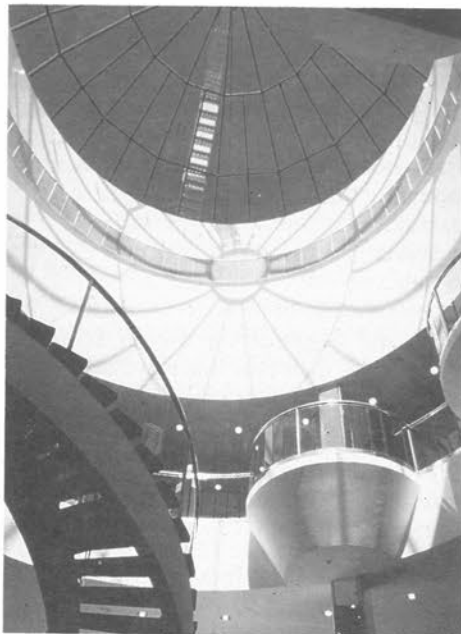
Cameron Chisholm & Nicol



Anglican Health & Welfare Building 1980



Education Department



Carillon, Canberra 1970



Marine Laboratories

for another twenty years; and a vital absence of decoration and historical reference. The space-enclosing and space-forming elements are all clearly separated as individual spatial functions. This separation is over-indulged in Wentworth Motors with the treatment of the angled roof and glass wall. Both buildings suffer the same lack of formal geometry and excesses in the use of materials shown by many early modern houses of the same period in Perth.

The twenty years from 1955 to 1975 was to be a period of very dramatic growth for the firm both in terms of the quantity of work and also the development and refinement of their formal aesthetic. The late fifties saw repeated experiments with aspects of Le Corbusier's early work which had been taken up by the International Style. Gil Nicol's residence of 1957, the Metro Tours and Phillips buildings dating from 1958 and the original RAC building in 1959, with its later addition, all demonstrate these concerns.

The sixties and early seventies were significant, principally because of the enormous increase in the volume of work. Aesthetic issues were often peripheral to the line of development towards that clarity of form-making achieved in the mid-seventies, although Ross Chisholm's own house is an exception. It won the award for Home of the Year in 1965.

During the early seventies Cameron Chisholm & Nicol were gaining commissions incorporating almost every building type. A selection from these commissions is illustrated to indicate the scope of the work. Perhaps the three most significant designs were Allendale Square, the Joondalup Competition entry and the new Chancery and Ambassadors residence in Brasilia. All were designed between 1974 and 1977 and together represent the turning point, as will be discussed later. Only Allendale was built, although the Joondalup entry won the competition. Competition successes were a feature of the sixties and seventies for the firm. Since 1959 when they won the Wesley Chapel, 32 competitions have been entered, 12 have been won, with 5 seconds and a third. They are presently working on two more.

The importance of the achievement with both Allendale and Joondalup in particular and a detailed analysis of the significance of this period from 1974 to the present are the subject of the critique to follow. (AA)