



Athol Hobbs

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Athol Joseph Hobbs (1899-1979) was born 2 February 1899, the fourth child of architect Joseph John Talbot and Edith Ann Hobbs. In 1897 Talbot Hobbs had designed a grand residence for his growing family, to be built on undeveloped land at a newly subdivided western suburb of Perth, Peppermint Grove. By the end of 1898, Hobbs had moved his family to the freshly constructed house which he named the *Bungalow*, and Athol was born in the still incomplete home. Athol was educated at Scotch College, Claremont in the years 1908 to 1912, and then at Bedford School in England from 1913 to 1916. He joined the British Army in late 1916, and moved to India for training.

During 1919 Lieutenant Athol Hobbs was engaged to Isabel (Babette) Hearn, trainee nurse and daughter of a Captain attached to his battalion. In October 1920, the twenty-one year old Athol married Isabel in India. Talbot and Edith Hobbs were ecstatic in July 1922 when Athol and Babette came to Perth on leave, and their first grandchild was born - John Athol Talbot (Tally) Hobbs. Tragically, just over a month had passed before nineteen year old Babette took her husband's service revolver and shot herself at the *Bungalow*. The death certificate stated temporary insanity, but in later years came societal understanding that the probable cause of the suicide was post-natal depression. Athol had to return from leave to India, and his baby Tally was left in the care of the Hobbs grandparents. Although the child now had no real mother, he was raised by his grandmother, Edith, by his aunt, Nancy, and by a nanny employed by the Hobbs.

After six years service in the Indian Army, Athol resigned his commission to commence study at the Architectural Association in London. By December 1926 Athol had passed his final qualifying examination, and was admitted as an associate of the Royal Institute of British Architects. Athol returned to Perth in February 1927, joining with his father in practice at Hobbs Smith & Forbes, and married for a second time, to Evelyn Croxon. This union produced a brother for Tally in 1931, Michael, who later briefly studied architecture before taking up a career in medicine. Continuing the family's involvement within the profession, Michael has a son Peter who is a well-known architect in Perth. After Evelyn's death in 1969, Athol married for a third time, to Aileen Hamilton in 1970.

Established in 1904, Hobbs Smith & Forbes was re-titled Hobbs Forbes & Partners in 1932 when Athol and others were admitted as junior partners. By the end of 1934, the two senior partners J.J. Talbot Hobbs (1864-1938) and W.J. Waldie Forbes (1869-1939) were semi-retired. In the early 1930s Athol Hobbs, Alex Winning (1892-1963), Bill Tracey, and Leslie Walker had formed the core of the office; and Waldie's son Howard 'Bill' Forbes (1904 -1975) began to make his presence felt in the business in the mid-1930s. There may have been some frustration for the younger architects of the office, as the elderly directors did not seem to be moving-on fast enough! With initial training in Scotland, Alex Winning was reported to have been an exceptional design talent in the office, and with Athol Hobbs' background in 1920s London, the younger architects developed greater artistic expression in their work – following the emerging Modern and Art-Deco Movements.

Recognising his professional status, Athol was elected a Fellow of the Royal Institute of Architects of Western Australia (FRIAWA) in November 1937, and a Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects (FRIBA) in March 1938. Seeking greater independence, Athol founded the firm of Hobbs & Winning with Alex Winning in January 1938, and immediately took on work from a number of organisations with whom he had previously established client relationships, including the Swan Brewery, and West Australian Newspapers. Talbot Hobbs died in April 1938, soon followed by Waldie Forbes in April 1939. A temporary interruption to Athol's professional career occurred when he served in the Second World War (1939-1945) from September 1939 until June 1943, then

returning to private practice. His mother Edith died in July 1943, fortunately by this time Athol was able to be present and mourn the loss with his family, and with many representatives of the architectural community in WA.

After the Second World War, a Court of Contemplation designed by Athol Hobbs was constructed at Kings Park in Perth, to the west of the State War Memorial (1929) designed by his father, and thus honoring the dead of both World Wars. Appropriate to their extensive military service and understanding, both Talbot and Athol were honorary architects for these works. In late 1945 another highly-talented Western Australian-born architect, William Thomas Leighton (1905-1990) returned from service and joined with Athol and Alex Winning, initially in association, hence practicing from 1946 as a partner in a new firm titled Hobbs, Winning & Leighton.

Hobbs Forbes & Partners eventually dissolved, and two powerful new Western Australian firms developed - Hobbs Winning & Leighton, and Forbes & Fitzhardinge. It appears that the two new firms split the record and drawing holdings up between them, and both kept a portion of the J. Talbot Hobbs Architect (1887-1904), the Hobbs Smith & Forbes (1904-1932), and the Hobbs Forbes & Partners (1933-1949) documents. It seems likely the Hobbs Winning & Leighton share of the drawings was taken by Athol Hobbs and Alex Winning in 1938. Another portion of the drawings was retained by Bill Forbes, and in 1949 he merged with John Fitzhardinge from Eales Cohen & Fitzhardinge to form Forbes & Fitzhardinge.

Following the Second World War, Hobbs Winning & Leighton produced many notable buildings, including the State Government Insurance Offices (1956) and the National Mutual Life Building (1958) in central Perth. Although it is impossible to attribute the practice's extensive works in the 1950s and 1960s to individuals, Athol maintained great pride in the Fremantle Port Authority Building (1964). Athol's directorship of the practice and ongoing maintenance of client relationships ensured Hobbs, Winning & Leighton remained successful. In the early 1960s the design and construction of new premises for the practice at 37 Ord Street, West Perth (ironically built on the site of a house occupied by architect Jack Ochiltree for over forty years) was a major statement of the company's prominence and of its modern design-ethos of the period.

Under Athol's and other partners' guidance, the business grew to become Hobbs Winning Leighton and Partners, practicing prolifically and with distinction for over five decades, and with the creation of a Sydney office in 1989, became Hobbs Winning Australia. At the very end of the twentieth century, the business was absorbed by the Woods Bagot company. It appears that in company change-overs, many of the early drawings that were with Hobbs Winning & Leighton have been lost, destroyed, or archived off-site. Despite persistent enquiry, their discovery and conservation remains a future challenge.

Athol had retired by the early 1970s, when Hobbs Winning Leighton and Partners had around seventy persons employed, with a branch office at Albany. At that time there were six partners, six associates, an engineer and an interior designer listed on the company prospectus. Athol had continued to live in Peppermint Grove after his second marriage, building a house in View Street, and enjoyed a number of recreational pursuits, including sailing from the Royal Freshwater Bay Yacht Club. He died at Peppermint Grove on 29 October 1979, aged eighty years.

References:

'Mr Athol J. Hobbs', *Western Mail*, 18 August 1927, p.10 (ARIBA, return to WA).

'Personal', *Western Mail*, 24 March 1938, p.59 (FRIAWA, FRIBA).

'Newsprint Store', *Western Mail*, 1 June 1939, p.29, (WA Newspapers warehouse Fremantle).

'Fremantle Additions, Bank of NSW', *The West Australian*, 29 July 1939, p.4 (Goldsbrough Mort store Fremantle, Bank NSW cnr James and Bank Streets Guildford).

'Flats, Retaining Wall', *The West Australian*, 7 December 1940, p.16 (4 flats Grant St Cottesloe, retaining wall Swan Brewery).

Hobbs Winning Leighton and Partners company prospectus, circa 1974.

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Hobbs Winning & Leighton photographs 1960s-1980s, 82 images by Fritz Kos, online at SLWA.

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West Australian Newspapers newsprint warehouse, High Street Fremantle 1939 (Google 2013).

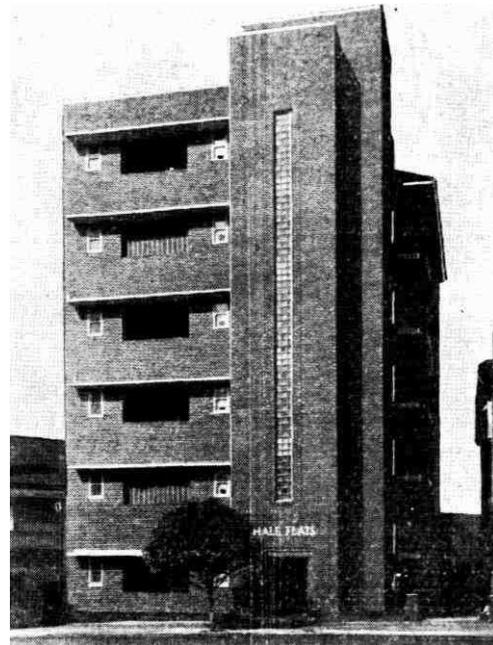


Perspective drawing of a nurses' hostel to be erected in Spring-street, Perth. It will be leased by the diocesan trustees of the Church of England to the Mount Hospital. The architects (Messrs. Hobbs and Winning) invite tenders for the work.

Nurses Hostel for Spring Street, Perth (*The West Australian*, 10 June 1939, p.8).



Perspective drawing of proposed six-storey flats for erection in Mount-street, Perth, for the diocesan trustees of the Church of England. The architects are Messrs. Hobbs and Winning.



Hale Flats, Mount Street Perth (*The West Australian*, 8 July 1939, p.8; 1 June 1940, p.9)



Fremantle Port Authority Building 1964 (SLWA 340628PD).



Hobbs Winning & Leighton offices, 37 Ord Street West Perth in 1966 (SLWA 340824PD)