



John Fitzhardinge
(RAIA)

John Berkeley Fitzhardinge (1911-2008) was born 15 February 1911 at Barraba in northern NSW, the first of eight children to Berkeley Ross and Lucy (nee Morgan) Fitzhardinge. John commenced working for Wright & Apperly Architects, a partnership between Arthur Henry Wright and Eric Apperly, also taking night classes in the architectural course at Sydney Technical College. John's father was a banker, and the family had moved around NSW with bank placements, before transferring to Western Australia in 1929.

In Perth, John soon joined the firm of Eales Cohen & Bennett, struggling through Great Depression years. After passing the examinations of the Architects Board of WA in 1934, he was registered as an architect in the State (no.150) during May of 1935. W.G. Bennett (1896-1977) left the partnership in 1935, and John became a partner in the firm of Eales Cohen & Fitzhardinge (EC&F) during 1937. In that year he was involved with EC&F's design of Guildford Town Hall in the Inter-War Art Deco style, and the Narrogin Inne utilizing Inter-War Old English style, just shortly before Eustace Cohen's (1881-1938) death at only 56 years of age in January 1938.

John Fitzhardinge had married Eleanor Adams at Surry Hills, Sydney in May 1929. Apparently the marriage was part of the young man's strategy to remain in NSW when the family moved to WA, and his parents did not know of the wedding until after the event. The attempt to remain behind failed, and John travelled to WA by ship with family. Eleanor filed divorce papers citing desertion in 1935, and a decree absolute was granted during 1936. John married again, to Gwendolyn Brazier at St Mary's Church South Perth in April 1937, and the couple had two children, John born in 1939, and Joanna (Jody) born in 1946.

Fitzhardinge's future business partner Howard Tyldsley (Bill) Forbes married Gwen's sister Phyllis Brazier in June 1940. Gwen was granted a divorce in 1952, the year that John married for a third time, to Helen Steele, and they had a daughter Anthea born 1955, with John gaining a step-son, Bill Steele.

Enlisting at Subiaco in October 1939, Fitzhardinge served in the Second World War from 1940 as a Captain in the Army, and after Japan entered the war, Bill Forbes of Hobbs Forbes & Partners (HF&P) left to join the navy in 1942. Both EC&F and HF&P are listed at St George's Terrace, Perth on the second floor of the WA Trustees Building in 1939. They were listed together there, practicing in association with few staff and little work under the guidance of the elderly J. Herbert Eales (1864-1957) until January 1946, when they merged as Forbes & Fitzhardinge. Successful post-war, the firm added a fifth floor on top of the WA Trustees Building in 1954 to assist with housing the thriving practice.

Following the deaths of senior figures Talbot Hobbs in 1938 and Waldie Forbes in 1939, the leading Perth-based firm of Hobbs Forbes & Partners gradually 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 (1904-1933), and the Hobbs Forbes & Partners (1933-1945) documents. One portion of the documents was retained by Waldie Forbes' son Bill, and became, with EC&F's papers, a vital asset to Forbes & Fitzhardinge.

Following the end of the war, Fitzhardinge was awarded a Member of the Order of the British Empire for outstanding devotion to duty. Captured by the crew of an Italian submarine in June 1941 whilst escaping from Crete in a small boat, he was a prisoner of war for four years in Italy and Germany. With fellow POW and life-long friend Ian Bessell-Browne (WX8), Fitzhardinge (WX9) arrived back in WA during June 1945, and soon returned to practice, also taking time to display the many paintings he had produced during his confinement.

After Eales had retired, in 1954 one of John's brothers David Moreton Berkeley (Bill) Fitzhardinge (1920-1996) and William Milton Barton (1913-2006) were admitted to the Forbes & Fitzhardinge partnership. Eustace Cohen's son Gres Cohen (1926-2008) became a partner in 1959, with A.G. (Tony) Brand joining

in 1964. In later years Michael Berkeley Fitzhardinge (1939-1999), a son of John's brother Roger, became a partner in the firm.

There were many continuing clients, in the earlier twentieth century working with Talbot Hobbs, Waldie Forbes, Herbert Eales and Eustace Cohen, that continued with post-war patronage of Forbes & Fitzhardinge. These included industrial companies such as the Swan Brewery, Dalgety & Co, Fremantle Cold Storage Co, Peter's American Delicacy Co (later Peter's Ice Cream), Harris Scarfe & Sandover, and Boans. No doubt with some connections from his family's activity in the sector, John Fitzhardinge was responsible for the design of numerous banks, including many rural premises across the State. In the 1950s and 60s Forbes & Fitzhardinge grew with the development of WA, retaining earlier clients who had deferred building due to previous restrictions on materials and available funds. The partnership flourished with Fitzhardinge providing design leadership and Forbes consolidating and developing the client and practice base. As the State's industrial base grew, the firm designed plants for Vickers Hoskins, Brisbane & Wunderlich, Bell Bros, Union Maltings and the B.P. Kwinana oil refinery. Plants followed these for BHP and Alcoa. They experienced growth in office buildings, retail stores, hospitals and aged care.

The firm was responsible for one of Perth's earlier high rise buildings, the 14 storey T&G building of 1961, on the south-west corner of Barrack Street and St George's Terrace. With city planning regulations ensuring that prime Perth properties were more valuable when heavily developed, the T&G was one of many 1960s and 70s office towers for banks and insurance companies in St George's Terrace, a good number designed by Forbes & Fitzhardinge. Unfortunately the people of Perth at this time held little understanding of the value of their forebears' quality Federation-era designs, unfashionable at the time, and the T&G building replaced a landmark Talbot Hobbs design of 1897.

The T&G was followed by high rise buildings for the ANZ Bank at 84 St Georges Terrace, and the Prudential Building on the south-west corner of Howard Street and St George's Terrace, replacing Dean Smith's 1903 *Surrey Chambers*. A client retained from earlier years was the Salvation Army, and in the early 1960s Forbes & Fitzhardinge designed for them one of the earlier multi-storey residential complexes in Perth, the Railton Temperance Hotel.

Forbes & Fitzhardinge produced a large share of Western Australia's finest buildings up until the 1990s, then evolving into Forbes & Fitzhardinge Woodland. Partner Steve Woodland married one of Michael Fitzhardinge's daughters, but the Fitzhardinge name finally disappeared in a merger as the company name changed to Cox Howlett & Bailey Woodland. Fortunately, many of the early Hobbs and Forbes drawings that were formerly with Forbes & Fitzhardinge have been deposited with the Battye Library.

John Fitzhardinge was President of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects (WA) 1949-1950, an RAI Federal councilor, and a Division President of the Australian Planning Institute. Described by family descendants as 'a real character', John was a keen sailor, successful in both river and ocean-racing, and serving as Commodore of the Royal Perth Yacht Club 1960-1962. In 1983 he married for the fourth time, to Judith Geoghegan, who wrote a vivid biography of John's war years entitled *Fighting for Life*, telling of his struggles through Greece and Crete, capture by the Italians and time in POW camps. With a long and distinguished career, Fitzhardinge practiced into the 1990s. He died 21 November 2008 at North Fremantle, aged 97 years.

References:

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'Perth P.O.W. artist to give display', *Daily News*, 28 September 1945, p.5 (inc. painting, photo).
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'Builders Active in The Terrace', *The West Australian*, 14 August 1954, p.12 (WA Trustees).
Forbes, H.T., Notes on the History of Forbes & Fitzhardinge, 1969, held by Ian Forbes.
Fitzhardinge, Judith, *Fighting for Life*, Hesperian Press, Carlisle WA 1996.
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'Collection of architectural plans of public buildings and private residences in Perth, Fremantle and various country towns', Forbes & Fitzhardinge, 1880-[1976], Battye Library CN 83; see also drawings donated by David Hodge, formerly of Forbes & Fitzhardinge, at 'Hobbs Smith & Forbes', Battye Library MN2402, ACC 6403A.
JBF eulogy documents etc held by son John Fitzhardinge jnr, nephew Chris Fitzhardinge.

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South British Insurance Building 23 Barrack Street, Perth (SLWA 239839PD)



John Fitzhardinge related to family that he was proud of his work for the Collie Mine Workers' Institute Building, a prominent landmark on the corner of Throssell and Patterson Streets, Collie. Other places he noted included Perth College, and Applecross District Hall. (Google 2014)



ANZ Bank Building 84 St Georges Terrace, Perth (SLWA 342623PD)



T & G Building of 1961 at 37 Barrack Street, Perth (SLWA 114950PD, 004143PD)