



Augustine Rieusset
(courtesy Brian Rieusset)

Augustine (Augustus) Benedict Rieusset (1854-1935) was born at *Steinschoenau*, a large family property at Southwood near Ramsgate, England. Rieusset descendants speculate that the child was named with respect to the famous English architect, designer, artist and critic, Augustus W.N. Pugin (1812-1852), or to connect with Pugin's St Augustine's Church & Grange at Ramsgate. Little is known of Rieusset's early years, but he married Jane Theresa Downey in 1878. Although not confirmed, family sources believe he 'graduated' as an architect in Liverpool, and Augustine sailed on the *Cuzco* with his wife, Jane and two sons to Australia in 1883, settling first in Melbourne.

A noted architectural historian in Victoria records that ... From around 1887 Melbourne leaders were Alfred Dunn in Hawthorn and Toorak, Christopher Cowper in Hawthorn and Camberwell (Grace Park, Broadway), Arthur Fisher in St Kilda, A.B. Rieusset in Caulfield, Henry Kemp and Beverley Ussher in Essendon, Kew and Canterbury." By 1890 Rieusset is mentioned in the *Building Engineering and Mining Journal*, and he was in practice at the Empire Buildings, 418 Collins Street, Melbourne. In 1892 Rieusset produced a winning entry for the Melbourne fire station (not built), was noted as the President of the Architectural & Engineering Association, and an 'influential architectural teacher in Melbourne'. By late 1894 he had ceased to be a member of the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects, and as for numerous other members, this situation was due to recession and a complete absence of work. With the depressed economic conditions in Victoria, Rieusset and his family joined an exodus of architects (and many others) for the gold boom economic conditions of Western Australia, arriving in Perth from Melbourne in 1895. He initially found work as a draftsman with Public Works Department at the rather meagre salary of £180, and by 1896 is no longer listed at the PWD.

We can surmise that Rieusset commenced private work in WA in 1896. A notice in *The West Australian* during September 1901 advised that 'A.B. Rieusset, Architect, for six years with H.S. Trigg', had opened an office in the Trustee Chambers, Barrack Street Perth. Harry Trigg, the first locally born and trained Western Australian architect, had been a prolific practitioner in the 1890s, and there is little doubt that Rieusset would have been a major contributor to Trigg's design output and success.

In 1898 Rieusset was in residence at 8 Alvan Street, Subiaco. *The West Australian* carried note in 1901 of an exciting development at nearby Rokeby Road, Subiaco - The King's Hall, for 'The People's Hall Co Ltd'. With the growth of the suburb, many residents felt that the construction of a large hall was required, and a limited liability company was formed to build a hall suitable to the growing requirements. The capital was subscribed in £10 shares, there being between seventy and eighty shareholders. Almost all the shares were taken up by local residents, who appointed the directors. The company acquired a fine elevated and central site in Rokeby Road; and erected a large hall at a cost of considerably over £2,000.

The hall was built to allow a two-storey structure, including shops, etc, in front. The brick building was designed by Rieusset, and may have been his first independent commission in WA. The hall's floor dimensions were 60 ft by 45 ft, with the walls 20 ft high at the lowest point and 27 ft to the arched panelled steel ceiling. Capable of seating 600 persons, it was stated that the King's Hall 'could be emptied in two minutes comfortably'. At the end of the hall the stage was 24 ft by 20 ft, with footlights suitable for theatrical entertainments. The loftiness of the hall permitted the erection of the two storeyed structure in front. On the ground floor was a large tiled entrance hall and crush lobby, with a shop front on each side. At the rear of the shops were ladies' and gentlemen's cloak rooms. The second storey is approached by a side staircase and was divided into a lodge room, waiting room, and two regalia rooms.

King's Hall was completed in 1902 and weekly dances, receptions, church concerts, and travelling exhibitions were hosted at the venue. It was also the venue for balls, boxing matches and events such as a reception that marked the end of the First World War, and the Pioneers Commemoration Oration of

WA's centenary year in 1929. Now privately owned, it was the social centre of Subiaco for the first half of the twentieth century. Timewells, a well-known Subiaco fashion and haberdashery business, occupied the building from 1952 until 2000. The Timewell family received a Subiaco Award Commendation when they renovated Kings Hall in 1990. The restoration works included the refurbishment of the beautiful vaulted pressed tin ceiling. Friendlies Chemist Subiaco moved into the King's Hall in 2000.

In August 1902, Rieusset and his wife Jane were returning to Subiaco from Guildford late at night. At 2am in the morning, they were involved in a potentially serious accident, as their horse and trap was run down by a goods train on the Bunbury rail line at the road crossing near Burswood. Although badly shaken, fortunately the couple were not seriously hurt. The horse died instantly, the trap was destroyed, and Rieusset subsequently sued the Commissioner of Railways for £200 in damages. Although the rail crossing procedure was less than adequate, Rieusset was also found to be negligent by inattention, and he was only awarded a farthing!

Domestic work in this period includes a villa at lot 7-8 Leeder Street, Leederville, for Ms M. Lavelle in 1902; and a villa at Lincoln Street, Highgate Hill, for Mrs Davis in 1903. In 1903 he designed another shop and dwelling at Subiaco. One of few privately practicing Catholic architects in the predominantly Protestant business circles of WA at the start of the twentieth century (others were M.F. Cavanagh, E.J. Henderson, and R.J. Dennehy), Rieusset also produced St Brigid's Catholic Church at Bridgetown in 1903.

Ongoing domestic work at Subiaco included in 1904 a villa at Lot 33, 220 Bagot Road, Subiaco; and in 1905, a villa at 130 Grant Street, Claremont, three villas at Denis Street, Subiaco, with another four villas at Subiaco built by Dan Hehir. Also in 1905, Rieusset called tenders for a brick residence on Guildford Road [now Great Eastern Hwy], Belmont, and it is possible that he developed this house for himself, as from this time until 1914 he was listed as having a residence at Lot 34, Guildford Road, Belmont. Rieusset appears to have completed a considerable amount of work with builder Daniel Hehir, and his son Ben Rieusset married one of Hehir's nieces. Great-grandson Brian Rieusset

understands that the Rieussets and the Hehirs travelled both to Australia, and to WA, together.

Rieusset called tenders in *The West Australian* during May 1906 for fencing, clearing, and levelling the rear portion of Lot 4, Location E, Adelaide Terrace – the site of the Crystal Palace Skating Rink, opened in 1903 by Dan Hehir. This was preparatory work for an exhibition promoted by the West Australian Chamber of Manufactures. *The West Australian Exhibition of Manufactures, Arts, Products, and Machinery in Motion* was opened with much fanfare by the Governor of WA, and held from 5 December 1906 to 5 January 1907 in Hay Street, East Perth. All exhibits, except those of trade processes in operation or machinery in motion, had to be manufactured in WA, and extensive musical entertainments accompanied the exhibition. Rieusset's most apparent contribution was the prominent Federation-style Hay Street facade of the exhibition hall, complete with entry archway, banded brickwork, and pediments all capped by fluttering flags and a octagonal base dome.

Rieusset's design for the Catholic church at Bridgetown may have lead to a commission for an Anglican church at nearby Donnybrook. At the laying of the corner stone of All Saints' Anglican Church, by J.W. Hackett MLC in November 1906, a local newspaper noted that 'The church will be a handsome edifice in the Norman style, built; entirely of Donnybrook stone and will consist of a nave 24 ft by 45 ft, with a chancel 16 ft by 16 ft, and two vestries 14 ft 6 in by 13 ft, and 12 ft by 12 ft respectively, with a large porch at the west end. When completed it will be one of the finest public buildings in the south-west, and reflects the greatest credit on the architect Mr A.B. Rieusset, F.R.I.B.A. [sic, Rieusset was advertising in *Wises Directory* as ARVIA].'

In early 1907 Rieusset had a pair of two-storey residences underway for Lot S29 in Adelaide Terrace, Perth. Another city project of the time was completed in June 1907, when the Rieusset-designed St Patrick's School for boys was opened by Bishop Gibney at the corner of Wellington and Lord Streets in Perth. Gibney used the occasion to confirm his denomination's frustration with the inequality of State funding in WA, at that time governed by a legislature dominated by Protestants. Gibney used the public occasion to continue a campaign of complaint that resonated with Rieusset, arguing that Catholics

contributed to the cost of all other schools, yet funded the construction of their own schools without assistance, whereas Protestant faiths failed to do so.

Rieusset's relative success may have allowed him to develop another property, and in 1911 he had built at lots 153-154, Riversdale Road, Belmont. Perhaps looking for a quieter and more reliable source of income, in late 1913 he applied to be a valuator for the Leederville Council, but was unsuccessful.

At least two sons served in the AIF during the First World War of 1914-1918: Robert James Rieusset born at Richmond, Victoria in 1886 and William Francis Rieusset born at Richmond in 1889. At his death Rieusset in 1935 was noted as 'the loved father of Mary (Mrs W. Warr, South Yuna), Maude (Mrs L. Bower, Dandaragan), Chris, Ben, Bob, Jack and William'. Chris had married Florence Burstall in 1902, Benedict married Elizabeth Hehir in 1906, Mary married William Warr in 1918, and Maude married W. Leslie Bower in 1924.

Sadly, Jane Rieusset died at Belmont in March 1914, and perhaps with commitment to her memory, in July 1914 Augustine called tenders for a new Catholic church at Belmont Park. St Anne's Catholic Church, Hehir St, Belmont was completed soon after, but Rieusset made a new start and moved to the next suburb, living at 14 Oswald Street, Victoria Park in 1916. With a reduction in available work during the First World War, the architect may have slowed down and embraced semi-retirement, but in November 1921 was still working at offices in Sampson's Buildings, Barrack Street, Perth. At this time he called tenders for a timber hostel at Wyalkatchem for the WA Bush Nursing Trust.

The *Architects Act of Western Australia 1921* received formal assent in 1922, and although nearly 70 years of age, Rieusset duly registered (no.14) with the Architects Board of WA that year. *Wises Directory* indicates that he first joined the West Australian Institute of Architects around this time. Family recollections include that he worked on the design of buildings at the University of Western Australia, and he may have again worked for other architects in the 1920s – possibly for Rodney Alsop. Living at 37 Hill Street, Perth, Rieusset died 5 August 1935 aged 81 years, and was buried in the Catholic section at Karrakatta Cemetery. With funeral arrangements, he was described as an 'Architect of Sampson's Buildings, Barrack Street, Perth' – indicating that he still had an office in the city.

References:

- 'Land for sale', *Argus*, 9 August 1890, p.7 (Rieusset at Empire Buildings, Collins Street west).
- Building Engineering and Mining Journal*, 11 October 1890, p.360.
- Building Engineering and Mining Journal*, 11 June 1892, p.237 (winning entry for fire station).
- 'A.B. Rieusset', *The West Australian*, 16 September 1901, p.7 (6 years Trigg, opened office).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 30 November 1901, p.3 (shops, hall etc Rokeby Rd Subiaco for The People's Hall Co Ltd).
- 'The King's Hall', *The West Australian*, 4 June 1902, p.2 (hall in Rokeby Rd, Subiaco).
- 'Run Down by a Train', *Daily News*, 5 December 1902, p.3 (Rieusset and wife in train accident).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 20 March 1903, p.3 (villa Lincoln St Highgate Hill, Mrs Davis).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 13 May 1903, p.3 (Catholic Church, Bridgetown).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 14 March 1905, p.3 (brick residence Guildford Road, Belmont).
- All Saints' Anglican Church, Donnybrook, *WAMBEJ*, 10 March 1906, p.22.
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 17 May 1906, p.1 (fencing, clearing, levelling for exhibition).
- 'Prospectus of Exhibition', *The West Australian*, 13 June 1906, p.9 (Chamber of Manufactures).
- 'Prospectus of the Exhibition', *Western Mail*, 16 June 1906, p.40 (exhibition dates).
- 'All Saints' Church Donnybrook', *The West Australian*, 1 November 1906, p.3 (corner stone).
- 'Donnybrook', *Bunbury Herald*, 2 November 1906, p.2 (All Saints Church corner stone laid).
- 'The Exhibition Committee', *Daily News*, 5 December 1906, p.3 (architect for WA Exhibition).
- 'St Patrick's School', *The West Australian*, 3 June 1907, p.2 (opened by Bishop Gibney).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 15 July 1914, p.4 (Catholic Church, Belmont Park).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 18 November 1921, p.10 (timber hostel Wyalkatchem for WA Bush Nursing Trust).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 30 April 1928, p.16 (alterations to shop fronts etc Victoria Park).
- 'Rieusset', *The West Australian*, 6 August 1935, p.1 (death notice and funeral arrangements).
- 'Letters of Administration', *Sunday Times*, 15 September 1935, p.10 (£140 to John Joseph Rieusset of South Perth).
- 'Public Notices', *The West Australian*, 18 December 1935, p.1 (37 Hill St, probate jurisdiction).
- Kelly, Ian, 'Western Australian Architectural Biography, 1890-1915', appendix to the Master of Architecture thesis: *The Development of Housing in Perth (1890-1915)*, UWA, 1991.
- Hamann, Conrad, 'Architecture', <http://www.emelbourne.net.au/biogs/EM00083b.htm> accessed 20 February 2013
- Brian Rieusset website, <http://rieusset.com/html/welcome.htm> accessed 20 February 2013

Contributing author: John Taylor

Heritage Committee meeting approval date: 18 April 2013 Last updated: 18 April 2013

Citation details:

Taylor, Dr John J., 'Augustine Benedict Rieusset (1854-1935)', *Western Australian Architect Biographies*, <http://www.architecture.com.au/i-cms?page=13453>, accessed DATE.



Parish Hall 1925 designed by M.F. Cavanagh on left, St Brigid's Catholic Church, Bridgetown 1903 designed by A.B. Rieusset on right (<http://bridgetownwahistory.com/cycc.html>)



Photo by

THE EXHIBITION BUILDING FROM HAY STREET

© Woker. 47. Bristow.

WA Chamber of Manufactures exhibition building fronting Hay Street, East Perth (*Western Mail*, 15 December 1906, p.26 – other photos of the exhibition can be found in the *Kalgoorlie Western Argus*, 18 December 1906, p.24, and SLWA 009317PD)



All Saints' Anglican Church, Donnybrook of 1906 (Google 2013)



St Anne's Catholic Church, Hehir St, Belmont of 1914
(<http://www.weddingwa.com/churches/church055.htm>)