



E. Owen Hughes

(courtesy Jan Larsen - from Shire of Cue photo archives)

Edward Owen Hughes (1867-1909) was born 31 December 1867 at Sutton Grange, near Harcourt in the Castlemaine area of Victoria. His parents were James Hughes, a contractor, and Janet, daughter of an engineer. Edward Owen appears to have been an only child. He married Mary Ann Moncrieff from Bendigo on 10 April 1889 at Fitzroy in Melbourne. They had two children, both born in Victoria, James (1890-1963) and Elizabeth (1891-1964).

The young architect appears to have preferred to use his middle name, and E. Owen Hughes is known to have practiced in Melbourne from 1889 to 1894. In 1893-94 he is listed at 108 Bellair Street, Kensington. Little of his early training or works has been documented, but Hughes seems to have been very active in his local area. On a death notice for his father (in December 1889 at Fink Street, Kensington), he was noted as 'E. Owen Hughes, architect, Kensington'.

Hughes was the architect of the former Kensington Property Exchange, Office, Shop and Residences at 166-8 Bellair Street, Kensington, constructed for James Wales in 1891-92. The large associated residence *Islington*, and the adjoining shop and residence are 'cleverly integrated into the overall composition which has been deftly designed to make best use of the steeply sloping corner site'. The flamboyant design of the building exterior is important for demonstrating the prominence of real estate agencies during the height of Melbourne's famous land boom, and the towered building which stands prominently on the corner of Bellair and Wight Streets reflected Wales' success

as well as the rise in Kensington land sales. The building is architecturally important as the finest example known of the work of Hughes, 'who designed many houses and shops in the vicinity'.

Hughes is likely to be one of many young professionals to have left Victoria after the combined effects of drought, depression, and the collapse of the Melbourne land boom in 1893 made work impossible to find. He may initially have moved to Sydney, as in 1895 he was listed at 136 Darling St, Balmain. In efforts to support his young family, the prospects for work in gold-boom Western Australia were extremely attractive, and the Hughes soon moved across the continent to the mid-west. By 1897 E. Owen Hughes is noted as the chairman of a meeting of the Loyal Pride of Cue Lodge of the 'Murchison Unity of Oddfellows', and secretary of the new Cue Masonic Lodge. Westpac Bank archives in Sydney contain two late 1890s drawings stamped 'E. Owen Hughes Architect and Building Surveyor Cue' for 'proposed additions etc' to a timber framed West Australian Bank building on the corner of Austin and Dowley Streets in Cue, although a new WA Bank building designed by Talbot Hobbs replaced the former structure on the site in 1900.

In 1899-1906 Hughes was listed in *Wise's Postal Directory* in practice at Cue. In 1899 he designed the Masonic Lodge at Cue, a building that has remained evocative of grander times in the Murchison Region. The Masonic Lodge perhaps understandably echoes the exuberance of the architecture of Victoria and New South Wales in the late 1880's. Little else is known of Hughes' later architectural work, although a tender notice for work at a Perth hotel confirms he continued to practice in WA until at least late 1905.

Records from Cue published in a booklet 'Just a Century Ago' give references to E.O. Hughes in 1899-1900 as a member of the Municipality of Cue, and in 1901 as Town Surveyor (supervising work for the new town water scheme) and in 1905 as seeking permission to erect a convent. At some time in the subsequent period, Hughes appears to have returned to Victoria, without his family, who remained at Cue. Family members do not retain knowledge of why he went back to Melbourne, and this is a matter for conjecture.

On 11 January 1909, 'Edward Owen Hughes, an architect of Kensington, husband of Mary Hughes, and father of James and Lizzie Hughes, of Cue, WA',

was found dead in the Saltwater River. Now known as the Maribyrnong, the river flows through the west of Melbourne, passing Kensington and joining the Yarra River. It was noted that Hughes had been missing for a fortnight. At the coroner's inquiry into the death, his mother Janet said that Owen ... 'lived with her, and that he was married, his wife being in Western Australia. Recently she had complained to him that he was neglecting his work. He suffered from sleeplessness, but never spoke about suicide. Three weeks ago he met with a bicycle accident. He was in bed at 11 o'clock on the night of going missing, but was not in his room the next morning.' A finding of "found drowned; there being no evidence to determine how Hughes got into the water", was recorded.

Hughes' widow, Mary, remarried to Edward Clarkson, of Cue and Day Dawn, at St Paul's Pro-Cathedral in Bendigo during March 1910.

References:

- 'Marriages', *The Argus*, 14 November 1866, p.4 (marriage of James & Janet).
'Births', *The Argus*, 9 January 1868, p.4 (birth of Edward Owen).
'Marriages', *The Argus*, 4 June 1889, p.1 (marriage of Edward Owen & Mary).
'Deaths', *The Argus*, 3 December 1889, p.1 (death of James).
Australasian Builder and Contractors' News, 24 December 1892, p.313 (Illustration of work).
Murchison Times and Day Dawn Gazette, 1 May 1897, p.2 (secretary of Cue Masonic Lodge).
'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 9 September 1905, p.2 (works at Court Hotel for B.C. O'Brien).
'Architect Found Dead in Saltwater River', *Barrier Miner*, 13 January 1909, p.8.
'Deaths', *The West Australian*, 16 January 1909, p.1.
'Architect's Death', *The Argus*, 18 January 1909, p.6.
'Deaths', *The Western Mail*, 23 January 1909, p.31.
'Marriages', *The West Australian*, 20 April 1910, p.1 (Edward Clarkson to Mary Hughes).
Correspondence Westpac Bank Archives to John Taylor Architect, 11 September 1996 (Cue).
John Taylor Architect, *Conservation Plan for the Masonic Lodge (former) Cue (1899)*, September 1996.
'Former Kensington Property Exchange, Office, Shop and Residences', accessed 2 March 2012 at <http://www.onmydoorstep.com.au/heritage-listing/4431>
Family information provided by great grand-daughters Anne Devereux, Jan Larsen and Robin Falk in March 2012.

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166-8 Bellair Street, Kensington, Victoria (Google 2012)



Masonic Lodge Cue (M. Lewi photo 30125DIG169-D16.jpg)