



### **Felix Whitwell**

(courtesy Bruce Callow Architect & WA Rowing Club)

**Felix Joseph James Whitwell** (1859-1936) was born in March 1859 at Bethnal Green, London to George James and Frances Elizabeth Whitwell. He served articles with his uncle, Edward l'Anson, a prominent London architect. Subsequently he migrated to Australia on the *Port Jackson*, and arrived at Sydney in 1887 aged 27, first practising in Sydney and later in Adelaide. From 1890 to 1893 he was listed as an architect at 342 George Street, Sydney. Little is known of his work at this time, other than that in late 1892 he called tenders for the erection of the North Shore Hotel, North Shore.

In 1895 Whitwell joined an exodus of architects (and many others) seeking work in the gold boom economic conditions of Western Australia. He initially entered the architectural division of the Public Works Department at a salary of £240, and his signature appears on PWD drawing 4064 for the Warden's Quarters and Office at Coolgardie. Whitwell resigned in mid-1896 to commence private practice in a partnership with ex-Sydney architect William Adams Drake.

'Drake & Whitwell, Architects and Engineers' first major design was for the Stock Exchange building in St George's Terrace, Perth, and the foundation stone was laid by Premier John Forrest on 22 October 1896. The partnership called tenders in July 1896 for four three-storey dwellings in Beaufort Street for J.O. Oxley; and in September 1896 on behalf of Joseph Charles for a hotel to be erected at the corner of Broome Road (now Hay Street), Rokeby Road, and Rowland Street, Subiaco, although the premises appear to have been used as a 'coffee palace' rather than a hotel. Drake & Whitwell also undertook domestic work, and there is note of further commercial activity at Barndon Hill (Rivervale) for the WA Brewery Company.

Married at Sydney in September 1888, Felix's wife Edith died at Perth in January 1897 aged just 32. A daughter Mildred born at Ashfield in 1891 and a son Craig Holden Whitwell born at Marrickville in 1894 both survived Felix – fortunately Craig, always known as Charlie, returned from service with the AIF from 1914-1918. When Charlie enlisted in 1914 he gave his father's address, as next of kin, at 21 Clive Street, West Perth.

The partnership with Drake was dissolved in 1899. Whitwell joined the Government Railways Department, where he practiced in the architectural section. Family descendants recall that Felix was involved with the design of the Horseshoe Bridge in Perth and with Fremantle Railway Station. He is credited with the design of the Mount Barker Railway Station (fmr) in Heritage Council of WA documentation.

Acting in an honorary capacity, Whitwell was the architect for the boatshed of the West Australian Rowing Club on Riverside Drive, Perth in 1905. In 1917 the government took advantage of Whitwell's honorary services as the architect of a scheme for ten returned soldier's houses at Osborne Park. The *Architects Act of Western Australia 1921* received formal assent in 1922, and Whitwell duly registered (no.16) with the Architects Board of WA that year. He was elected to the Board in late 1924. The official program for the 1925 War Memorial at Midland Railway Workshops records Whitwell as the supervisor for the project.

For many years Felix Whitwell was honorary treasurer of the Royal Institute of Architects of Western Australia. Aged 70, he was appointed as Registrar of the Architects Board of Western Australia in July 1929, and served in this capacity for the last seven years of his life. Still extremely productive in his later years, Whitwell produced a number of suburban domestic designs in the mid-1930s, at Leederville, Mount Lawley and Wembley.

Living at 53 Tareena Street, Hollywood in his final years, Whitwell died in a Perth private hospital on 20 January 1936, aged 76 years, and was buried in the Anglican section at Karrakatta Cemetery. As he practiced primarily as a public servant in WA, many of Whitwell's architectural works and achievements are not immediately discoverable. The list of names of those in attendance at his funeral indicates that he was held in great respect by others in the profession, and also by the wider community.

It was noted in an obituary that Whitwell was 'prominently associated with Masonic activities, and in his early days took a keen interest in rowing. A fancier of dogs, Mr Whitwell was a judge at various kennel exhibitions.'

#### References:

- 'Tenders required', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 August 1892, p.1 (North Shore Hotel).
- 'Public Notice', *The West Australian*, 11 June 1896, p.3 (D & W partnership start).
- 'Stock Exchange of Perth', *The West Australian*, 23 October 1896, p.2 (J. Forrest lays stone).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 1 July 1896, p.8 (four dwellings Beaufort St for J.O. Oxley).
- 'Provisional Certificates', *The West Australian*, 15 September 1896, p.6 (hotel for J. Charles).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 23 September 1896, p.6 (hotel at Subiaco for J.Charles).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 2 October 1896, p.3 (semi-detached villas Beaufort Street).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 23 January 1897, p.6 (residence and stabling, Claremont).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 11 March 1897, p.6 (first-class family residence South Perth).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 3 April 1897, p.6 (shops and living rooms at Subiaco).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 5 July 1897, p.3 (St Georges Tce, Loton Res, Exchange Club).
- 'Messrs Drake and Whitwell', *The West Australian*, 7 August 1897, p.2 (opinion on location of parliament house).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 25 September 1897, p.3 (residence Mill Point South Perth).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 5 March 1898, p.2 (additions Barndon Hill for WA Brewery Co).
- 'Public Notice', *The West Australian*, 8 July 1899, p.1 (dissolution of partnership).
- 'Rowing – West Australian Club', *The West Australian*, 16 December 1905, p.13.
- 'Osborne Park Poultry Farms', *The West Australian*, 10 December 1917, p.9 (hon. architect).
- 'Meeting of Architects', *The West Australian*, 2 August 1924, p.14, (election to ABWA).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 18 August 1934, p.3 (residence Cambridge St Leederville).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 12 March 1935, p.6 (residence Dumbarton Crs Mount Lawley for L. Glendenning).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 6 July 1935, p.3 (residence Alexander Street Wembley).
- 'Mr F.J. Whitwell Dead, Well-Known Architect', *The West Australian*, 21 January 1936, p.14.
- 'Funerals', *The West Australian*, 22 January 1936, p.16 (names of pall-bearers etc).
- 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.
- Conservation Policy and Report on the Cultural Heritage Significance of the West Australian Rowing Club Boatshed Riverside Drive, Perth*, Bruce Callow Architect, October 1992.
- Pers. comms. 25 Feb 2013, 6 March 2013: Joan Whitwell of Applecross WA.

Contributing author: John Taylor

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

#### **Citation details:**

Taylor, Dr John J., 'Felix Joseph James Whitwell (1859-1936)', Western Australian Architect Biographies, <http://www.architecture.com.au/i-cms?page=13453>, accessed DATE.



Stock Exchange, St George's Terrace Perth, at left as completed in 1897 and at right, severely 'modernised' in the 1930s (SLWA 004197D & 341164PD)



Premises constructed on the corner of Broome Road (now Hay Street), Rokeby Road, and Rowland Street, Subiaco, for Joseph Charles circa 1897 (SLWA 113531PD).



View of corner of Hay Street, Rokeby Road, and Rowland Street, Subiaco in 2013 (Google).