

PHOTO REQUIRED

Thomas Whitney

(courtesy x x)

Thomas Whitney (c.1858-1925) was probably born during 1858 in the United Kingdom, but further research is required to accurately identify the upbringing, education and training of this enigmatic architect. Thomas Whitney arrived on 29 October 1886 at Fremantle, Western Australia from Melbourne, Victoria on the *S.S. South Australian*. He had been appointed to manage the St George's Terrace, Perth branch office of Melbourne-based architect George Charles Inskip (1840-1931), a Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA). Inskip appears to have first come to Western Australia in 1879 to superintend initial work on Edmund Blacket's design for St George's Cathedral, Perth. By 1884, Inskip was commissioned to design a new Union Bank in Albany, eventually completing premises in WA for the same company at Perth, Fremantle, Roebourne, and Geraldton.

Newspaper advertisements of November 1886 advising the opening of Inskip's WA office describe its manager Whitney as an architect and surveyor, and a member of the Society of Architects, London. This note gives rise to a supposition that young Whitney had migrated to Australia from England in the mid-1880s, as the Society of Architects was formed at London in 1884. At that time 'Fellows' and 'Associates' comprised two distinct classes of membership of RIBA. They were respectively entitled to use the post-nominal affix 'FRIBA' or 'ARIBA'. The formation of the Society of Architects was a result of a campaign by a group of Associates to be allowed to vote on the affairs of the Institute which the Fellowship class had resisted.

Thomas Whitney was soon working for Inskip on the completion of St George's Cathedral (Blacket had died in 1883), and also at Fremantle, where he supervised the construction of Inskip's design for the three-storey Federal Hotel (now Rosie O'Gradys) in William Street, opened in July 1887. With the completion of the hotel, it appears Whitney soon branched out on his own account, calling tenders from his Henry Street, Fremantle office during

November 1887 for four houses on behalf of Rev D.G. Watkins. He was listed 1888-1889 in the *WA Almanack* as an architect in Fremantle.

Whitney was one of very few private architects in WA during the 1880s, and participated in early moves to form a professional body in the State. In February 1887, a meeting of architects was held in Perth 'at which every member of the profession in private practice was present', and where it was 'unanimously resolved to form an Association for protecting the rights of private practitioners'. The West Australian Architects Association formed a deputation to the Governor in November 1888, maintaining a previous complaint about government employees providing architectural work independent of their official public works duties, and at less than the 'recognised commission as laid down'. The delegates stated that the Association's rules and fee scale were drawn directly from those of RIBA, with the exception that a few extra charges were allowed. The Association's members included James Wright, Harry Trigg, Thomas Whitney, George Light, Francis Bird and John G. Taylor.

During August of 1891, Whitney called tenders for alterations and additions to the National Hotel at Fremantle, but he appears to have been only modestly successful with obtaining commissions in the metropolitan area. By January 1892 he was located in Geraldton, probably lured by the emerging prospects of activity in the mid-west goldfields. At Geraldton and under direction of an early prospector, Whitney prepared a map for commercial sale, outlining the principal features of the Murchison Goldfield. From Geraldton in late 1892 he called tenders for wine cellars at Cooringa near Toodyay, and in 1895 he was still listed in practice at Geraldton. Whitney is not listed in *Wises Directory* of 1897, but from 1898-1900 was in practice at the goldfields town of Mt Magnet.

During the period 1901-1904 Whitney is again not listed, but from 1905-1911 he was practicing at another goldfields town, Cue. The first Bishop of Geraldton, W.B. Kelly initially guided his diocese from Cue, and it is likely that through this local connection Whitney provided the design in 1907 of the timber framed, iron-clad St Saviour Church at Yalgoo. Based at Austin Street in Cue, in September 1909 he called tenders for pulling down and rebuilding the Royal Mail Hotel at Meekatharra for J.A. & C.M. Roberts. This project may have precipitated another move, and in September 1913, Whitney called tenders

from Meekatharra for a residence in Shenton Street, Geraldton, on behalf of Arthur Hanlon of the Royal Mail Hotel. Whitney is not listed as an architect from 1912, which is not surprising considering the decline of the goldfields in this period and the resultant scarcity of work. Detailed local studies may be able to identify whether Whitney obtained other employment to remain in the area.

Thomas Whitney died 23 February 1925 aged 66 years, and was buried in the Anglican section of Meekatharra Cemetery.

References:

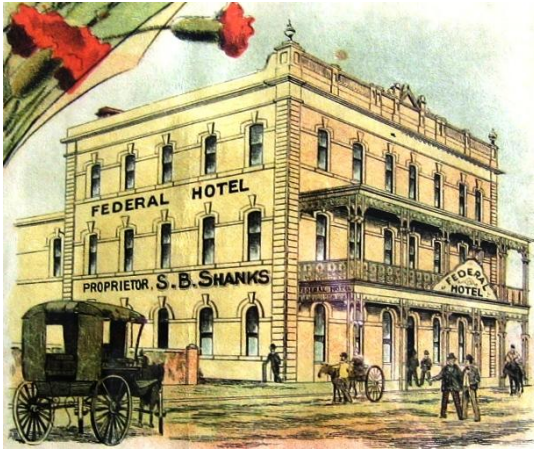
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- 'Tenders', *Inquirer & Commercial News*, 16 February 1887, p.5 (timber, St George's Cathedral).
- 'Herbert v. Foreman', *The West Australian*, 15 April 1887, pp.2-3 (Whitney's opinions in court).
- 'The Federal Hotel', *Western Mail*, 9 July 1887, p.20 (Whitney as George Inskip's WA rep).
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Federal Hotel, now Rosie O'Gradys, William Street, Fremantle (F.W. Niven & Co, 1892 found at SLWA 5189P, Vol. 199; <http://fremantle.rosieogradys.com.au/Content/our-history>)



St Saviour Church Yalgoo, at left of photo, opened on 1 September 1907, but has been demolished (courtesy of Dominican Sisters, Doubleview).



Royal Motel Hotel, Meekatharra in 2008 (www.panoramio.com, photo Leslie A Crockford).