

Charles Lancelot Oldham

(Battye, J.S., *Cyclopedia of Western Australia*, Vol.1, 1912, p.628)

Charles Lancelot Oldham (1865-1920) was born 22 September 1865 in Ballarat, Victoria and studied at Ballarat College. Oldham served articles with the firm of Tappin & Gilbert, architects of Ballarat, Melbourne and Sydney. Charles spent three years in Sydney after completing his articles, before taking up a position with the Victorian Government Railways. He then opened his own practice in Melbourne, and in June 1890, became a partner in the firm of Kempson & Connolly as their representative in Ballarat. He was elected an associate of the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects on 7 June 1892.

The early 1890s were a disastrous economic time in Victoria, and many businesses had little or no work. Consequently many young men and women were forced by circumstances to move to more prosperous locations. Oldham eventually came to Western Australia seeking to enjoy better conditions precipitated by a gold boom and period of building expansion. In 1897, he commenced practice in Fremantle with J. Herbert Eales. One of their more visible works is the Marmion Memorial, a Saxon Cross located at the intersection of Queen Victoria and Parry Streets, Fremantle; another is the Fremantle Markets, for which they won a competition in 1897. The partnership of Oldham & Eales was also responsible for the Detmolds Building in William Street, and the Australian Steam Navigation Co (P & O Building) in Phillimore Street, Fremantle.

During November of 1901, Charles Oldham married Susan Hoyle Russell, and they had nine children between 1902 and 1918, although two died as infants.

Oldham practised alone between 1901 and 1905, when he entered into partnership with Alfred Cox. In 1912 it was noted that the partnership operated from Perth and had designed 'the commercial premises of George Wills & Co and Dobbie & Co, Copley's Buildings in Roe Street, Emanuel Buildings, AMP Chambers, and the Marlborough Hotel'. Also recorded at this time was that Oldham and Cox were responsible for the design of 'a large and ever-increasing number of the most important homesteads, hotels, and villa residences in the area surrounding the metropolis. Worthy of special mention is the Geraldton Town Hall, ...'.

Daughter-in-law Ray Oldham later wrote of Oldham and Cox's successful developments at Howard Street in Perth: 'The entire east side of Howard Street was his work. As early as 1904 he was designing professional offices here for the legal firm of Haynes, Robinson & Cox. ... Other offices followed: for N.W. Harper in 1909; for the Hon Mathew L. Moss M.L.C. in 1911; Nos. 16-18, a diminutive but powerfully-scaled building. Most impressive was Oldham's imaginative five-storey Emanuel Building on the south-east corner of St George's Terrace and Howard Street, built for Isadore and Sidney Emanuel in 1907. This was one of very few buildings in the State illustrating in its details the sinuous forms of Art Nouveau.'

Ray Oldham notes other works in Perth at the King Street precinct. 'Just north of His Majesty's Theatre are several of Oldham's buildings: a warehouse built 1903 for F.A. Henriquez; another 1905 for J.J. Green; and on the north-west corner of King and Murray Streets, the large, impressive offices and warehouse of G. Wood & Co in 1905. ... This architect's advanced methods of construction attracted much attention with his 1905 Hay Street shop, factory and showrooms for A.W. Dobbie & Co where 'the whole of the 50-foot frontage is carried on a single girder and there is an unbroken shop-front 50 feet wide.'

The climax of Oldham and Cox's Perth buildings came in 1912 when they were commissioned for the new AMP building on the corner of St George's Terrace and William Street. The seven-level building, completed 1915, was one of Perth's most impressive landmarks. It provided an interesting skyline with a group of symbolic statuary surmounting the corner site. The statuary was commissioned from renowned sculptor Pietro Porcelli. With demolition of the

AMP building in 1972, the artwork was bought by Lew Whiteman, and later sold to land-developers who installed the group at Churchlands.

Oldham & Cox also contributed to the distinctive quality of Fremantle's townscape. In High Street he designed many shops and offices. Hotels for which Ray Oldham credited Charles as the architect included: South Fremantle for R.H. Holmes in 1903; Maylands; at Cottesloe, a 40-room hotel with several luxury suites overlooking the ocean; the two-storey brick hotel a Merredin for Frank Angel in 1906; refurbishing the Freemasons Hotel, Geraldton in 1907 for O. and E.A. Trigg, the hotel at Mingenew for R.J. Rayne in 1908; the Port Hedland Hotel; Parkerville Hotel 1910; and the Railway Hotel, Southern Cross for A.E. Booth.

Oldham was the architect for several renowned residences in the metropolitan region. At the top of Mount Street, on the corner of Bellevue Terrace and Cliff Street, was a many-gabled mansion for Isadore Emanuel. It appears that Oldham was the architect for all the buildings constructed later for the Emanuel brothers. For Sidney Emanuel he designed *Bellevue* at 134 Forrest Street, Peppermint Grove. A number of fine corner residences which Oldham designed at Peppermint Grove are found at 24 View Street, 58 Leake Street, and at 5 View Street, the grand *Unalla* for Henry and Bessie Rischbieth.

Another Oldham-designed residence famous in its period was *Killowen* at Mount Lawley. Built for R.T. Robinson, it stood in nine acres of land that extended down to the Swan River and included gardens which were also designed by the architect. It was later converted for the Sisters of Mercy, and remains a portion of St Anne's Hospital. Also for Robinson, Oldham built *Sorrento*, a holiday house at Middleton Beach, Albany.

Although Alfred Cox may also have had input into the works, Ray Oldham credits Charles with country homesteads including a large bungalow at *Tarwonga* 1909; *Urella* at Mingenew for E.F. and L.H. Darlot 1910; the large homestead, woolshed and shearing shed at Broomehill for the Emanuel property Woodyarrup; for W.G. Burges' Siding, York, the 'new' *Tipperary* 1912; a large station residence at *Moonyoonooka* around 1913; a residence at *Meenaar* in the Gascoyne 1914; a residence at Williams 1909; a two-storey residence at York; and a brick villa at Beverley for Mrs Blechynden.

It is likely that with the reduction in business during the First World War, the Oldham & Cox partnership became difficult to sustain. In May of 1918, the partnership was dissolved by mutual consent, and Oldham again conducted his own business until his demise on 20 March 1920. Oldham's death was noted at Albany, where the newspaper reported some of his recent domestic work on the south coast: 'Mr Charles Oldham, architect of Perth, died with painful suddenness after an operation at 8 o'clock on Saturday night. He was taken ill but three days before. Mr. Oldham was well-known professionally in Albany, and had spent much of the past summer here, having been architect for the residences just erected at Middleton Beach by Messrs. R.T. Robinson, Ross Anderson, and Harold Piesse.'

Resident at 148 Forrest Street, Peppermint Grove in his later years, Oldham achieved a considerable measure of respect with his personal attributes and achievements. His funeral was attended by most of Perth's architectural and building community, as well as numerous social, business and family acquaintances. His practice was taken over by Harold Boas on the condition that the Oldham name was retained, and the firm became Oldham Boas & Ednie-Brown in 1923, when Colin Ednie-Brown, who had been articled to Oldham, became a partner. Charles' brother, Ronald Gregory Oldham (1867-1937) was a builder and also an architect. Charles' son, John Bramston Oldham (1907-1999) was an architect renowned for his landscape design work.

References:

Oldham elected ARVIA, found in RVIA Council Minute Books - minutes of meeting 7 June 1892, p.59, State Library Victoria, MS 9454, box 1, barcode M06207.

'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 30 November 1901, p.3 (Semi-detached villas, Hampton Rd Fremantle for Mrs. M. Cable)

'The Late Mr W.E. Marmion -Memorial at Fremantle', *The Western Mail*, 18 January 1902, p.12.

'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 23 April 1902 p.3 (2-storey hotel and outbuildings cnr Fitzgerald and Angove Sts North Perth for A. Dowell [Rosemount Hotel])

'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 18 October 1902 p.5 (brick shops, factory, store etc, Roe Street, Perth for S.W. Copley)

'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 13 November 1903, p.2 (bungalow View St Cottesloe for C.R.P. Andrews [is this *Fermain*, 45 View St, Peppermint Grove?]); 4 villas Hampton St Fremantle for H. Higham; villa Bayswater for R. Burnside; villa Congdon St, Claremont for M.J. Durack).

Battye, J.S., 'Oldham & Cox', *Cyclopedia of Western Australia*, Hussey & Gillingham for the Cyclopedia Co. Adelaide, 1912, Vol.1, p.628.

'Notice', *The West Australian*, 20 May 1918, p.1 (dissolved partnership).

Death of Oldham noted at Albany, *Albany Advertiser*, 24 March 1920, p.3.

News and Notes, *The West Australian*, 25 March 1920, p.29 (funeral attendance).

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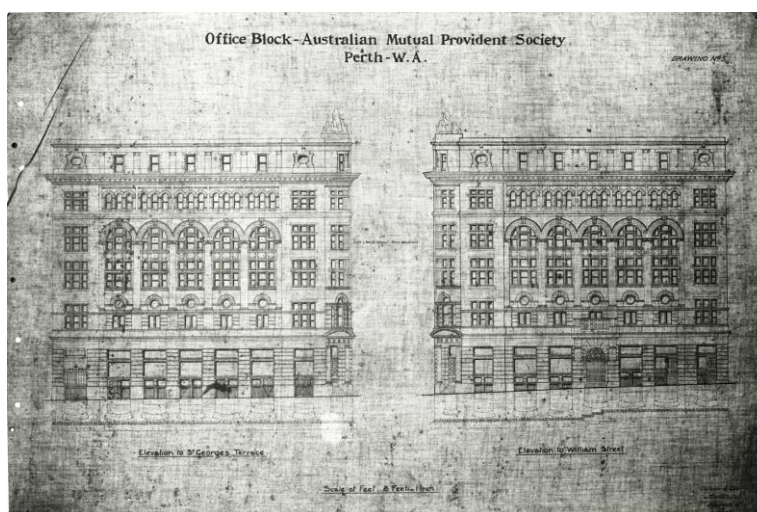
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Contributing author: John Taylor

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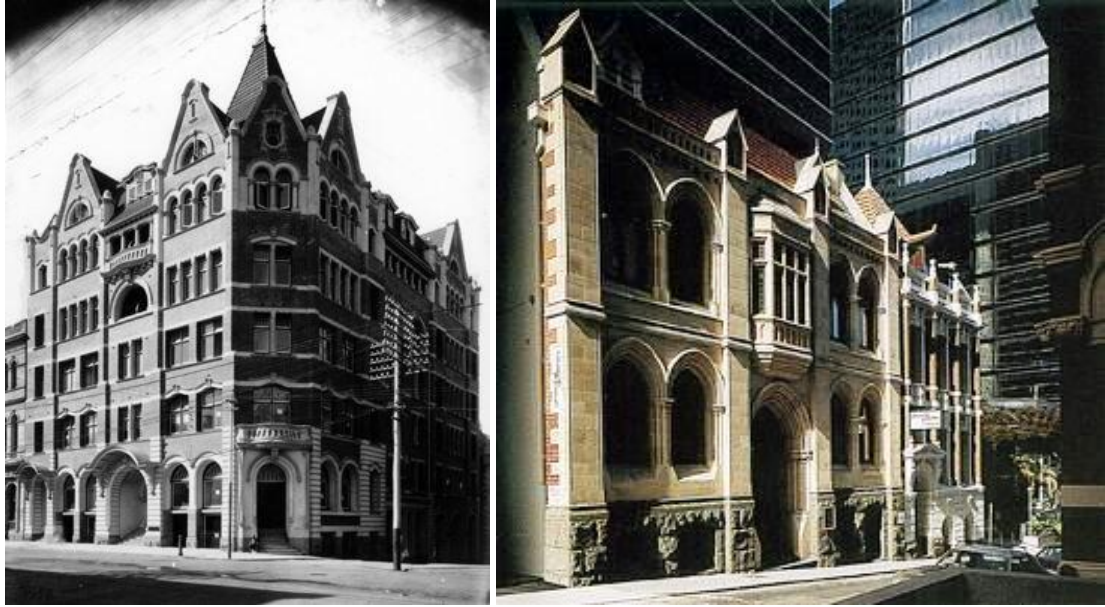
Taylor, John J., 'Charles Lancelot Oldham (1865-1920)', *Western Australian Architect Biographies*, <http://www.architecture.com.au/> accessed DATE.



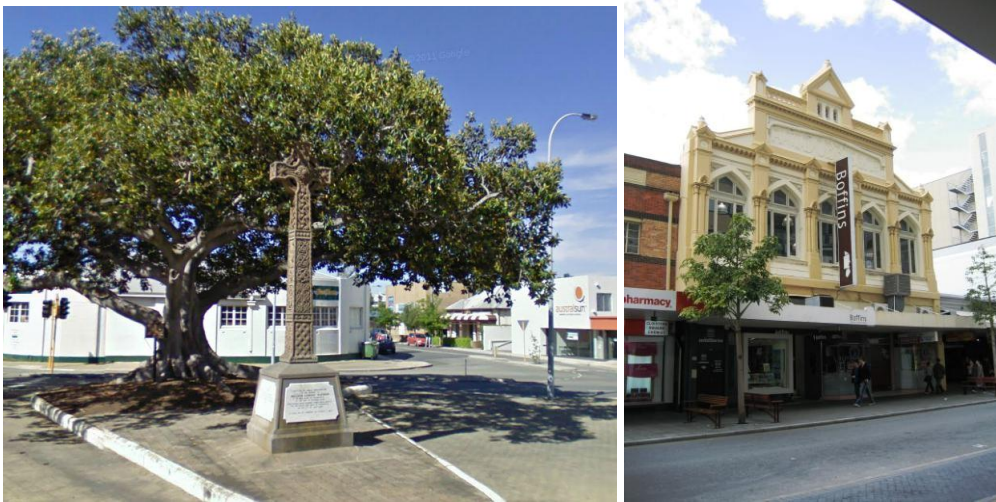
AMP Office Building, for the north-west corner St George's Terrace and William Street, Perth (Muhling Collection)



AMP Building, cnr St George's Terrace & William Street, Perth, shortly before its demolition in 1972 (Fritz Kos SLWA 341133PD)



Emanuel, later Perpetual Trustees, Building, cnr St George's Terrace & Howard Street, Perth (SLWA 003995D); 18 & 20 Howard Street, Perth (HCWA Pic509)



Marmion Memorial, Fremantle (Google 2012); A.W. Dobbie Building, Perth (John Taylor 2008)



Killowen, Mount Lawley (SLWA 006783D)



Unalla, north-east cnr View and Forrest Streets, Peppermint Grove (Pascoe p.50).



58 Leake Street, Peppermint Grove (Google 2012)



The wrap-around verandahs have been removed and various additions made to the 1902-built Rosemount Hotel, cnr Fitzgerald and Angove Streets North Perth (Google 2013).