



Clifton family in the mid-1890s, L-R: Mervyn, Gordon, Laura, Charles, Harold, Kate, and in front Beatrice, Constance, Marian (SLWA BA 26/1); the young musician Gordon at 14 years of age – in 1898 (*The West Australian*, 3 January 1953, p.12).

Charles ‘Gordon’ Clifton (1884-1967) was born 24 January 1884 at Fremantle, the son of Charles Leonard Worsley (1854-1928) and Kate (nee Compton) Clifton (1862-1951). The couple had married at St John's Church, Fremantle in October 1879, and Gordon's father Charles was for many years the manager of the Western Australian Bank at the port. Gordon had seven siblings - Laura Elizabeth b.1880, Leonard b/d.1881, Reginald Mervyn b.1882, Beatrice Kate b.1885, Constance Grace b.1888, Marion Amy b.1889, and Harold Glynn b.1892.

The Cliftons were a productive WA family from the 1800s. Gordon's great-grandfather Marshall Waller Clifton (1787-1861) came from England in 1841 with his wife Elinor and thirteen of their fifteen children. He was appointed Chief Commissioner of the Western Australian Company, intending to form a settlement at Australind. When the project failed, Clifton and his family stayed on and farmed. Later many of his descendants became members of the WA Public Service, and others held important positions in the State.

During the WA gold-boom of the 1890s, Gordon gained his early education with attendance at Fremantle Grammar School and Perth High School. He was a gifted young man, excelling in both music and sketching. Clifton joined the prolific architectural firm of Cavanagh and Cavanagh in the later 1890s, and was made an Associate member of the West Australian Institute of Architects (WAIA) in February 1905. Michael Francis Cavanagh (1860-1941) was the senior partner at Gordon's workplace, and Michael's younger brother James Charles Cavanagh (1875-1958) played a lesser role in management of the practice.

In 1905 James Cavanagh travelled to Europe to further his studies, and this may have been an encouragement for Clifton to also move and further his career at London in mid-1906. The *Evening Mail* suggested in August 1906 that Clifton had been successful utilizing one of his other talents: *Fremantle-ites will doubtless be glad to hear of the unqualified success achieved by Mr Gordon Clifton, son of Mr C.L. Clifton, manager of the WA Bank, Fremantle. This young artist left the State a few months ago with the intention of following more closely the profession of an architect, but apparently abandoned it in favor of pen and ink sketching, at which he is considered one of WA's best. We are pleased to note that in the June number of 'Health and Strength', a monthly journal in the "big smoke", he has contributed no less than five sketches. ...*

In September 1909, *The West Australian* newspaper noted that: *Mr Gordon Clifton, who recently returned to Perth from London, where he went to further his knowledge in architecture four years ago, has decided to practise his profession in Perth. Before going to Europe to study Mr. Clifton was a pupil and assistant of Messrs M.F. and J.C. Cavanagh of Perth for nine years, and has had considerable experience of public and domestic architecture. Mr Clifton is an associate of the Western Australian Institute of Architects, and is also a member of the Architectural Association, London.*

At the Annual Meeting of WAIA held in March 1910, Gordon Clifton was 'welcomed on his return to Perth'. He was listed as an architect at 62 St George's Terrace Perth in 1910, and at 35 Henry Street Fremantle in 1911. Herbert Parry had joined the Cavanaghs in partnership through 1908-1911, and it appears Gordon re-joined Cavanagh and Cavanagh from around 1911, working alongside the similarly-aged Gordon Royle (1886-1970). With the security of this employment, Gordon Clifton and Eleanor Veronica Thompson were married at St John's Church, Fremantle in May 1913, and the couple celebrated the birth of a daughter Erin Joyce at Claremont in 1914. At the Annual Meeting of WAIA held in March 1914, Gordon Clifton was elected as Secretary, and he was reappointed to the position the following year. In April of 1914 Gordon was invited into the Cavanagh partnership to broaden the practice's scope, with subsequent advertisements recording Cavanagh, Cavanagh & Clifton Architects located at the Commercial Bank Chambers in Perth.

Projects of 1914-1915 advertised under the three partners' names included a residence at Bayly Street Geraldton for journalist and politician J.M. Drew; two shops on the corner of Newcastle and Charles Streets in Perth; St Patrick's Presbytery at Adelaide Street Fremantle; and a residence at 11 Wright Street Highgate Hill for Alex H. Malloch.



MWSS&DB survey diagrams suggest these are the Cavanagh, Cavanagh & Clifton designed shops of 1914, on the north-west corner of Newcastle and Charles Streets Perth (Google 2023)



Presbytery, 47 Adelaide Street Fremantle (The WA Record, 11 July 1914, p.16; Google 2023)

Despite the impending birth of his second child, in July 1915 Gordon enlisted in the Australian Imperial Forces (AIF) for First World War (1914-1918) service at 31 years of age. On 12 October 1915 the Cliftons celebrated the safe arrival at Fremantle of their son Gordon Glynn, and in November 1915 he transferred to the AIF Tropical Force for relatively safe service (compared to the European 'Western Front') in the formerly German-held portion of New Guinea. Gordon arrived at Rabaul, and was detailed for duty at Kokopo, a further 30kms to the south, on 6 January 1916. He was able to return to Perth on furlough for Christmas of 1916, returning to New Guinea in January 1917. Eventually placed in charge of a roads and surveys department, Clifton departed from Rabaul in May 1918, and transferred via Australia to Nauru, where he was stationed from August 1918 until his discharge in April 1919. Thus he missed the February 1919 birth of second daughter Maxine Lavinia at Fremantle.

Gordon was one of a fair number from the WA architectural profession who served in the First World War including Talbot Hobbs, Ross Harwood, Edwin Summerhayes, Eustace Cohen, Gordon Royle, Reg Summerhayes, Claude Harrison (son of prominent architect Percy), Ronald Hardwick (son of WA Government Architect), Oswald Spangenberg (later Spanney), William Nelson, Kenneth Duncan, and Albert (Paddy) Clare. Harold Boas also served overseas with the Australian YMCA, working with Jewish soldiers in Britain and France. Architect Robert Thompson McMaster and draftsman David Jackson were both killed at Gallipoli in 1915. Part of the same contingent from WA as Clifton, draftsman Rowland Wilson died whilst at New Guinea in 1916, and Keith Stronach, a junior member of the architectural firm Summerhayes and Boas, died in a flying accident over England during 1918.

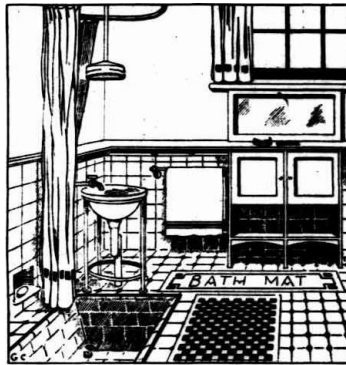
Finally returning to WA permanently in mid-1919, Gordon was appointed architect to the War Service Homes Commission at a salary of £300, but he bristled at Federal Government directives to use unsuitable designs from the east coast, and his services were terminated after twelve months. In September 1920, the *Sunday Times* supported Clifton: *Michael Angelo could not have succeeded in the circumstances. The Federal Mandarins insist upon everything being directed from Melbourne. Hence bungling, failure, and exasperation. Mr Clifton was 15 years with Messrs Cavanagh, and that is sufficient testimonial for us.*



Examples of Gordon Clifton's cartoons (*The W.A. Sketcher*, March 1904, p.5; *Western Mail*, 15 September 1921, p.24)

By 1921 Gordon was listed in practice at the Surrey Chambers in St George's Terrace Perth, with his residence 'Nauru' located on the corner of Eric and Broome Streets in Cottesloe. In February 1921, Gordon was elected as a Fellow of WAIA along with other respected members of the profession in T.W.L. Powell, A.D. Cameron, G. Herbert Parry, Eustace Cohen, and F.J. Whitwell. Clifton's tender notices for 1921 include a residence at Peppermint Grove for V. Browne, a residence corner of Greenham and Railway Streets in Cottesloe for A.W. Sinclair, and for alterations and additions to premises on the corner of Napoleon and Railway Streets in Cottesloe. In the same year he designed an Honour Board for WA Lacrosse players who went to the First World War.

The *Architects Act of Western Australia 1921* received formal assent in 1922, and Gordon duly registered (no.56) with the Architects Board of WA in July of that year. In February 1923, Gordon relocated his office to the Royal Arcade Chambers in Perth. His tender notices for 1923 include a motor car depot and five room residence at Railway Street in Swanbourne; a jarrah bungalow at Burracoppin for W. Wilkins; and works at Beaufort Street in Perth. By 1924 he had designed a residence at Shakespeare Street in North Perth for C. Bowyer.



Sketch for a house at Osborne ('A Unique Bathroom', *The West Australian*, 26 May 1924, p.5)

Clifton obviously had a great talent for illustrating his ideas, and this was demonstrated with a sketch for a bathroom in a residence that he designed at Osborne [Claremont] in 1924: *This was recently incorporated in a modern house at Osborne, from plans by Mr Gordon Clifton, architect of AMP Chambers. The bath is constructed of brick, 15 inches deep and tiled. It can be used for a bath or plunge. The wooden grating sits over it, if necessary, for the shower only to be used, whilst the hand basin is also available while standing in the bath. The floor and walls, to dado height, are tiled and drain into the bath. ...*



'Behind the Front' caricature of Billy Roberts by Gordon Clifton (*Call*, 6 August 1926, p.5)

In the mid-1920s there are further newspaper notes of Clifton's work as an 'architect and artistic caricaturist', including work in a 1925 'Gum Leaves Calendar' for the Little Citizens League. And he was continuing with his musical career, as outlined in *The West Australian* newspaper during November 1927: *At the end of this year Mr Gordon Clifton will have completed his 30th year as a professional musician in Perth. His first public appearance was at the old Mechanics Institute (now the Agricultural Bank) on May 10, 1894, in Governor Robinson's time. In 1897 he was starred at Cremorne Gardens, Perth, as the youngest cornet soloist in Australia and from then on has been associated with most of the old theatrical companies appearing in the city, including Broughs, Alf Dampier, Johnnie Sheridan, George Rignold, Charles Arnold, Nance O'Neill, Maggie Moore, and many others. In 1908 Mr. Clifton played solo cornet with the Royal Italian Military Band at Earls Court, London, under Signor Guidi, who by a coincidence happened to be the bandmaster of Bostock's Circus (London) which visited Western Australia in the Coolgardie boom days. Mr Clifton and Eddie Callow are now associated together at Hoyts' Regent Theatre.*



Gordon Clifton at 43 years of age (*The West Australian*, 12 November 1927, p.6)

Born at Fremantle on January 24, 1884, Gordon Clifton became solo cornetist in the old Fremantle Infantry Band at the age of 10. He was -the subject of much chaffing, and ragging by the boys of his age through having to wear the regimental red coat and regulation white, spiked helmet - which, he recalls, had to be stuffed with a newspaper to prevent it slipping down on to his shoulders. 'The West Australian' of May 10, 1894 reporting a concert given in the old Mechanics Institute, stated, inter alia: "His Excellency the Governor (Sir William Robinson) said that the boy who played the cornet (Clifton) showed such remarkable ability, such excellent intonation and taste for music, that if he studied hard he was very likely to be heard of by and by as a player." In 1904 Mr Clifton appeared at the old Queen's Hall to play cornet obligatos for Madame Aila Crossley, in 'The Lost Chord,' 'Nearer, My God, to Thee," etc. Appearing at the same concerts were Percy Grainger, Eduard Scharf, and W.A. Peterkin.

Gordon was listed as an architect in his own right up until the mid-1930s, but the scarcity of tender notices for Clifton projects as the 1920s progressed suggest that he may have been enjoying working in his sketching and musical capacities as much as in architecture. It is possible that Gordon had also resumed working for a larger architectural practice. By September of 1930 *The Advertiser* at Fremantle noted that Gordon had been appointed manager of the architectural firm Oldham Boas and Ednie-Brown at Fremantle, and he may have been employed in their Perth office in the 1920s: *ENTERPRISE - It is pleasing to realise that somebody has confidence in Fremantle in these days when everyone is talking depression and closing up avenues of development. The advent of a new firm in the City of Fremantle is a sign of confidence in the future of the Port. Messrs Oldham, Boas and Ednie-Brown, the well-known architects and town planners of Perth, have recently opened new offices in Trustee Buildings as an evidence of their belief, in the future progress and prosperity of Fremantle.*

The firm comprises the late C.L. Oldham, who practised his profession for many years in Fremantle with Mr J.H. Eales, and was well known here. Mr Harold Boas is a councillor of the City of Perth, and has practised in Perth for the last 25 years. Mr. Boas is Chairman of the Metropolitan Town Planning Commission, and Mr Colin Ednie-Brown, son of one of our earlier Conservators of Forests. The branch is under the control of Mr Gordon Clifton, who is a purebred Fremantle-ite, and

son of the late Mr C.L. Clifton, who was manager of the W.A. Bank here for many years, one of Fremantle's most respected citizens.

We beg to inform the public that,
for the convenience of Fremantle
clients we have OPENED a BRANCH
of our Perth Office at
FREMANTLE
Where our Mr. C. Gordon Clifton
F.R.I.A., is in attendance as our
representative
**Oldham, Boas &
Ednie-Brown**
**ARCHITECTS, LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS
TOWN PLANNERS, AND SWORN
VALUATORS**
W.A. TRUSTEE CHAMBERS
(Cnr. Adelaide & Queen Streets)
FREMANTLE
Telephone FM 2578
and **A.M.P. CHAMBERS, PERTH**
Tel. B 3695

Oldham Boas and Ednie-Brown's Fremantle office (*The Advertiser*, 24 July 1930, p.1)

From 1931 to 1934 there are a numerous mentions in newspapers of Gordon's sketching activities: 1931 through 1934 in a 'Little Citizens' Calendar', in 1932 of 'Prize-Winning Posters', and in 1934 within a 'Film Poster Contest'. By 1934 Gordon had succeeded W.R. Myers as District Architect for the Public Works Department (PWD) at Katanning. The financial security afforded by government employment in Depression years is likely to have been keenly sought, and he may have had significant competition to gain the posting.

Amongst overseeing many PWD projects throughout the south of the State (including Albany), Gordon was specifically involved with the PWD's design of nurses quarters for Katanning Hospital in 1934, and in 1937-1938 was the Honorary Architect for a new Infant Health Centre at Katanning. The *Great Southern Herald* noted in January 1939 that Gordon and Eleanor Clifton had left Pinwernying at Katanning for a fortnight's holiday on Rottnest Island. At Gordon Glynn (aka Bill) Clifton's enlistment for Second World War (1939-1945) service in 1940, his father's address was listed as Amherst Street, Katanning. Bill served in the Middle East and at Milne Bay before his discharge in 1945. Unfortunately in June 1947, Bill was riding a bike in West Perth and was involved in an accident with a motor car, suffering severe head injuries.

The Chair of the Katanning Road Board reported on the 'probable loss of the District Architect' in January 1946, and it is likely that Clifton retired in his early 60s, although it is possible that public service records could be found to confirm further details of Gordon's service in the State's employ. Gordon Clifton passed away at West Perth on 5 August 1967, aged 83 years. Eleanor Clifton died at Wembley 6 October 1994, aged 102 years.

To date relatively unknown in the history of the WA architectural profession, Gordon Clifton's work is similar to that of many who were 'behind-the-scenes' designers in larger architectural practices. He was no doubt a great contributor to the success of the Cavanagh architectural firms in gold boom times, to the early influence of the West Australian Institute of Architects and its successors, to the ongoing growth of Oldham Boas & Ednie-Brown in the Twentieth Century, and finally to the quality of the activities of the PWD in the south of WA in the 1930s and 1940s. With his local architectural training supplemented by as-yet undocumented experience in England, and with his great talents in music and sketching, Gordon's story is one of great interest to local history in WA.

Gordon's younger relative, Marshall Clifton (1903-1975) was a very prominent and celebrated architect-artist in WA during the mid-Twentieth Century.

References:

- The W.A. Sketcher*, No. 1 (Mar. 1904)-no. 3 (1904), SLWA 052A WAS (newsprint by Clifton).
 'State News', *Western Mail*, 11 February 1905, p.31 (elected AWAIA).
 'Fremantle Artist - Success in London', *Evening Mail*, 3 August 1906, p.2.
 'Personal', *The West Australian*, 29 September 1909, p.7 (return to WA).
 'W.A. Institute of Architects', *The West Australian*, 21 March 1910, p3 (welcomed back at WAIA).
 'Marriages', *The West Australian*, 5 June 1913, p.1 (at St John's Church Fremantle).
 'Personal', *Western Mail*, 17 April 1914, p.37 (partner Cavanagh and Cavanagh).
 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 16 May 1914, p.5 (residence Bayly St Geraldton for J.M. Drew, 2 shops cnr Newcastle and Charles Sts West Perth).
 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 11 August 1914, p.1 (presbytery Fremantle for Oblate Fathers).
 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 7 January 1915, p.3, (Wright St Highgate Hill for A.H. Malloch).
 'Mainly About People', *Daily News*, 4 May 1915, p.3, (suffering from typhoid).
 NAA B2455, CLIFTON C G, POB Fremantle, POE Perth, NOK W Clifton Eleanor (war service).
 'Western Australian Institute of Architects', *Western Mail*, 2 April 1915, p.12, (Clifton secretary).
 'Architects and War Work', *The West Australian*, 16 December 1916, p.6.
 'News and Notes', *The West Australian*, 26 January 1917, p.6, (WAIA fete return to New Guinea).
 'Those War Service Homes', *Sunday Times*, 5 September 1920, p.9.

'War Service Homes', *The West Australian*, 13 September 1920, p.7 (letter to Editor).

'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 8 October 1920, p.6 (resumed practice at Surrey Chambers).

'The Housing Problem', *Daily News*, 11 October 1920, p.7 (War Service Homes).

'Personal', *The West Australian*, 11 February 1921, p.6 (elected FWAIA).

'The Ladies Section', *Sunday Mirror*, 3 April 1921, p.4 (authorship, artist, cornet).

'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 25 May 1921, p.9 (residence Peppermint Grove for V. Browne).

'Tenders', *Sunday Mirror*, 3 July 1921, p.2 (residence cnr Greenham and Railway Sts Cottesloe for A.W. Sinclair).

'Lacrosse', *The West Australian*, 27 July 1921, p.9 (Honour Board for First World War).

'Cartoonlets', *Western Mail*, 15 September 1921, p.24; 22 September, p.20; 29 September, p. 24.

'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 20 May 1922, p.11 (cnr Napoleon and Railway Streets Cottesloe).

'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 10 February 1923, p.1 (moved to Royal Arcade Chambers).

'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 19 February 1923, p.10 (motor car depot and 5 room residence Railway St Swanbourne).

'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 4 April 1923, p.3 (jarrah bungalow at Burracoppin for W. Wilkins).

'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 5 September 1923, p.3 (work at Beaufort Street Perth).

'A Unique Bathroom', *The West Australian*, 26 May 1924, p.5 (house at Osborne).

'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 3 November 1924, p.4, (Shakespeare St North Perth C. Bowyer).

'Leaderettes', *The Leader*, 9 October 1925, p.2 (artistic caricaturist)

'Gum Leaves Calendar', *Call*, 11 December 1925, p.1 (for Little Citizens League).

'Leaderettes', *The Leader*, 25 February 1927, p.2 (architect and black and white artist).

'Public Notice', *Bunbury Herald and Blackwood Express*, 15 June 1927, p.2 (acting F.W. Steere).

'Mr Gordon Clifton', *The West Australian*, 12 November 1927, p.6 (cornet player).

'Little Citizens' Calendar', *The West Australian*, 24 November 1931, p.13 (illustration by GC).

'Prize-Winning Posters', *Daily News*, 10 November 1932, p.10.

'Little Citizens' Calendar', *Western Mail*, 8 December 1932, p.14 (illustrations by GC).

'Film Poster Contest', *Western Mail*, 1 March 1934, p.10 (GC at 77 Olive Street Subiaco).

'Little Citizens' League', *The West Australian*, 26 November 1934, p.5 (illustrations by GC).

'Social and Personal', *Great Southern Herald*, 1 December 1934, p.2 (nurses quarters Katanning).

'Social and Personal', *Great Southern Herald*, 9 February 1935, p.5 (succeeded Myers as DA).

'Centre Building', *Great Southern Herald*, 21 May 1938, p.2 (Hon. arch. for Infant Health Centre).

NAA: B883, WX7175 Clifton Gordon Glynn, DOB 12 Oct 1915, POB FREMANTLE WA, POE CLAREMONT WA : NOK CLIFTON LINDSAY.

'Katanning Road Board', *Great Southern Herald*, 25 January 1946, p.3 (loss of District Architect).

'Cremorne Gardens Charged 1 shilling', *The West Australian*, 3 January 1953, p.12, (GC aged 14 youngest cornet soloist in Australia).

Heritage Committee review: 19 October 2023 Last updated: 19 October 2023

Citation details:

Taylor, Dr John J., 'Charles 'Gordon' Clifton (1884-1967)', Western Australian Architect Biographies, <http://www.taylorarchitects.com.au/Biographies.html> accessed DATE.