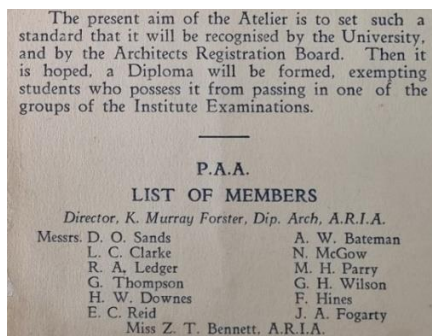


Harry Downes in the late 1930s (*Tee Square Journal*, 1937, p.5; niece Estelle Blackburn)

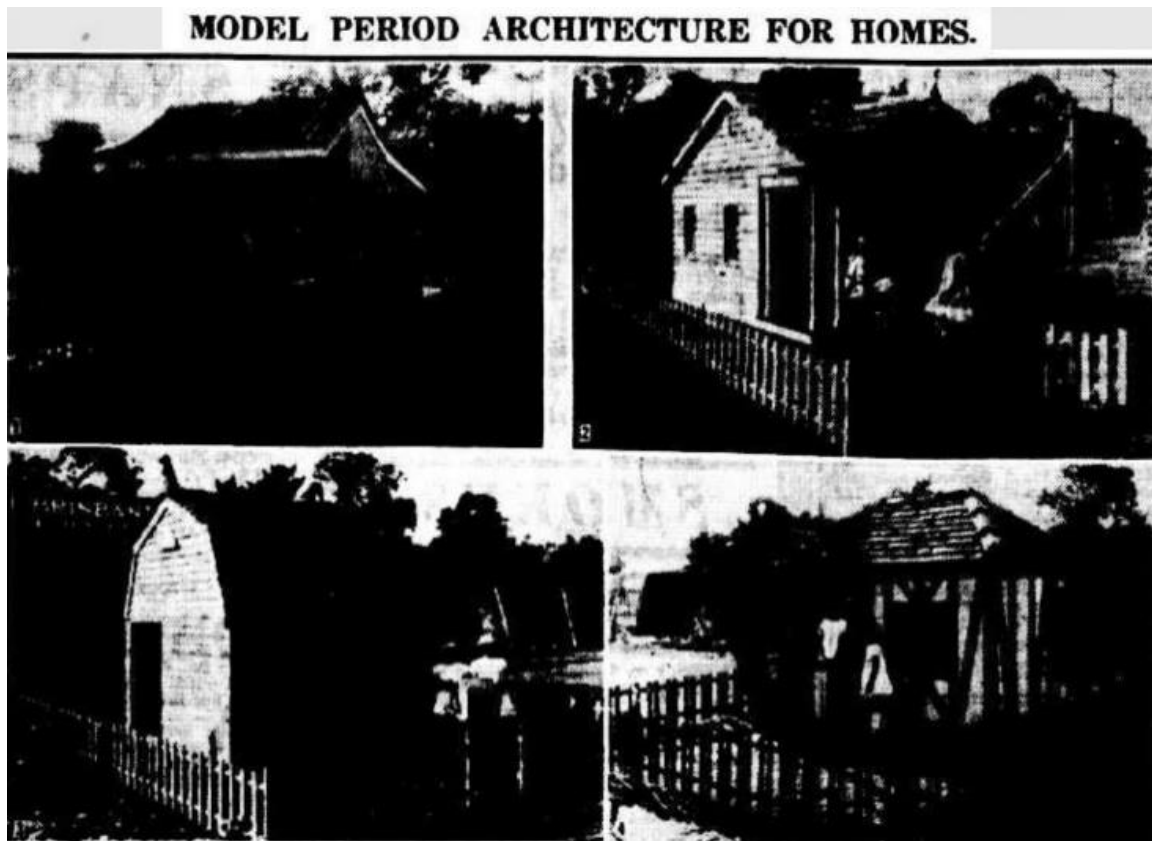
Harry Wraith Downes (1918-1943) was born 31 March 1918 at the Western Australian goldfields town of Boulder. Parents James (1889-1967) and Ethel Margaret (nee McCahon 1894-1970) Downes of Brown Hill had their marriage registered at Boulder in 1916. Rejected for First World War service following medical examination in February 1916, James was a clerk with the Railways Department at Kalgoorlie, and Ethel was employed at the Telephone Exchange. The couple had further children Margaret Mercer at Brown Hill in 1920 and James Bramble at Northam in 1922.

Harry attended school at North Kalgoorlie, and then Collie High School. Just prior to his sixteenth birthday, he was articled to Harold Boas (1883–1980) of Oldham Boas & Ednie-Brown architects in the AMP Chambers at Perth, at a cost of £100. Harry was a member of the inaugural Perth Architectural Atelier (PAA), established at Perth Technical College (PTC) in 1934 under the directorship of Murray Forster (1907-1967). The PAA was relocated to the University of Western Australia (UWA) in 1936, and renamed the School of Architectural Design. The studio class experienced difficulties with support, and was discontinued in the early stages of the Second World War (1939-1945), with a formal architectural course not finally established at PTC until 1946.



Portion of brochure for the Perth Architectural Atelier 'Premier Exhibition' shown at Harris, Scarfe & Sandovers in Perth, opened by Sir J. Talbot Hobbs in December 1934. (Chris Ledger)

Seventeen year old Harry was a winner in a small homes competition sponsored by the Royal Institute of Architects of Western Australia (RIAWA) and Brisbane, announced in January 1935. *The West Australian* newspaper reported in March 1935: *Promoted by H.L. Brisbane and Co., a competition was held recently among student architects for the best designs in period architecture for homes. Many students entered the competition which was run under the aegis of the Institute of Architects, the judges being the president and secretary of the Institute (Messrs. Waldie Forbes and R. Summerhayes) and Mr. H. L. Brisbane.*

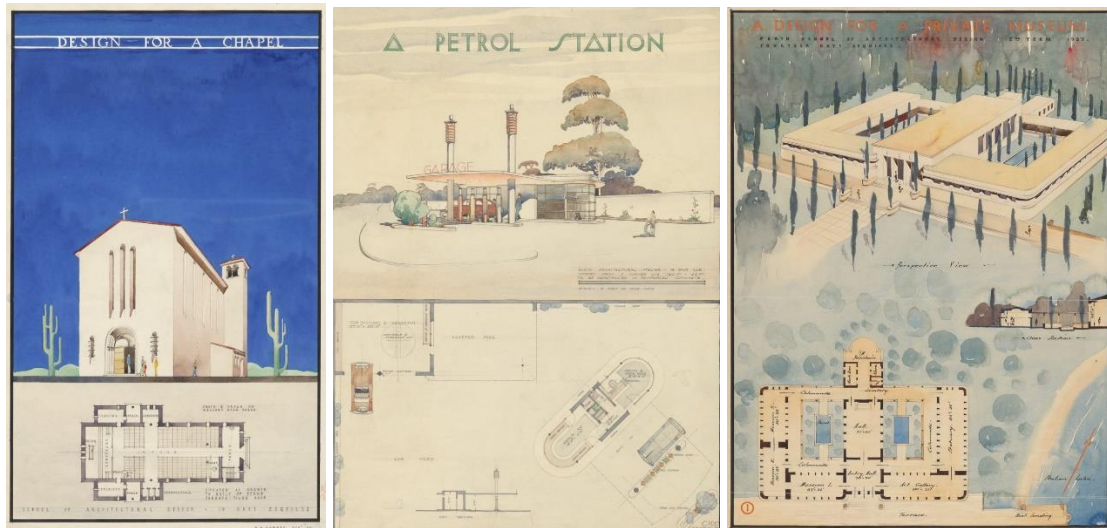


Model homes built from prize-winning designs in a competition and erected at 'Bristle Park on Stirling Highway, Claremont' [now Rose Gardens, Nedlands]. The styles of houses and the designers: (1) Spanish, Norman McGow; (2) Georgian, Harry Downes; (3) Colonial, Ron Ledger; (4) Tudor, Fred Hines. ('Period Architecture', *The West Australian*, 9 March 1935, p.4).

Harry was a member of the Architectural Association of WA, acting as Honorary Secretary, Business Manager and General Editor of its journal in 1937; and the President in 1938. Living at 35 Vincent Street Nedlands, he attended evening lectures for students at UWA, some given by the elderly Alfred Wright (1861-1939), and also the design class under the brilliant architect William Leighton (1905-1990) in 1937.



The Design Class at UWA Crawley, with Bill Leighton standing front left; and editorial staff for the Architectural Association's *Tee Square Journal* of 1937 (pp.22, 27). Of the four staff shown, only Arnold Camerer, unable to serve due to medical issues, survived the Second World War.



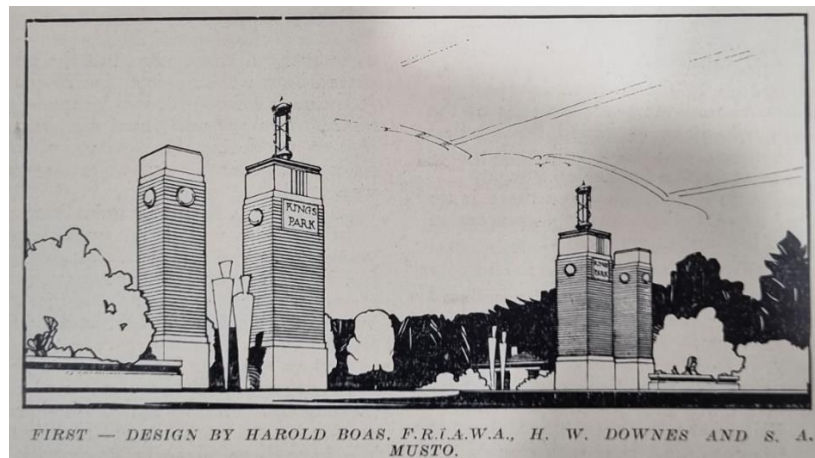
Some of Harry Downes' student drawings of 1936-37: designs for a Chapel; a Petrol Station; and a Private Museum (Curtin University Archives).

Recognizing his outstanding performance as an architectural student, at the Annual Meeting of the Royal Institute of the Architects of Western Australia (RIAWA) held in July 1938, Harry was presented with the Institute's Bronze (later E.G. Cohen) Medal by Wright. Following the October 1938 annual examinations of the Architects Board of Western Australia (ABWA), it was announced that Harry Downes, a pupil of Harold Boas, James A. Russell, a pupil of Reginald Summerhayes, and Fred W. Hines had all passed the examinations.

Harry registered with ABWA (no. 165) in June 1939 (he had to wait until after his twenty-first birthday), around this time the family moved to the next house at 37 Vincent Street Nedlands. Harry played hockey with Claremont Cricketers, golf at Cottesloe Golf Club, and was a member of the Nedlands Tennis Club.



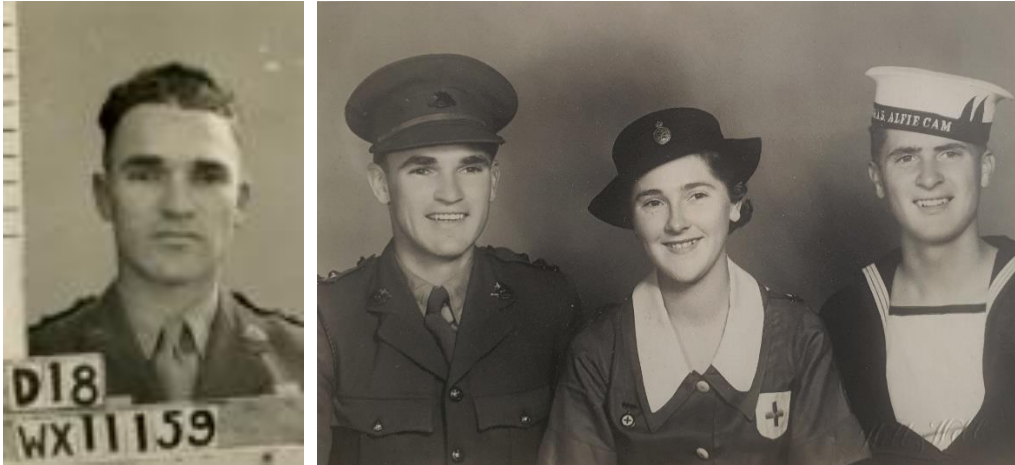
Some of Harry Downes' drawings of October 1938 for the ABWA Annual Examination: designs for a Riverside Yacht Club; and a Country Hotel (Curtin University Archives).



First place winner in architectural competition for a King's Park Entrance Way by Harold Boas, Harry Downes, and Sydney Albert Musto (1919-1996) - another articulated pupil of Boas' (*The Architect*, September 1940, p.16). Other buildings at Perth that Harry had been working on included the Adelphi Hotel, Emu Brewery, Gladden Building; and the Lake Way Hotel at Wiluna.

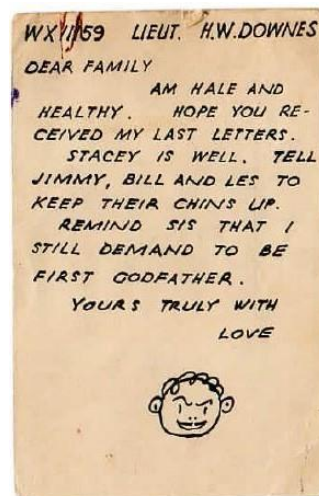
With declining architectural work, and a desire to serve his country following the outbreak of the Second World War (1939-1945), Harry enlisted for service with the Royal Australian Engineers and was with the 2/6 Field Park Company by late 1941. His commanding officer was Travers Lewis (1900-1955), another WA goldfields-born architect. Both were captured by the Japanese at the fall of Singapore on 15 February 1942 and sent to the Changi prisoner of war camp; worryingly for the parents of Harry, his sister Margaret was also serving in the Australian Women's Army Service (AWAS) and brother Jim was in the Navy.

The Australian War Memorial notes that "In April 1943, Harry was attached to a labour group of Australian and British prisoners of war known as F Force, and was sent to work on the notorious Burma–Thailand railway. Conditions for the prisoners were extremely harsh; the men were over-worked, underfed and poorly treated. Disease and malnutrition were rife, and men died in their thousands."



Harry Downes at enlistment as a 23 year old in 1941 (NAA B883, WX11159, p.22; with sister Margaret and brother Jim (niece Estelle Blackburn).

In October of 1943 the *Daily News* reported that Harry was “hale and hearty” in a prison camp, but in fact after suffering great deprivation in the forced march from Singapore through Malaya, and then in Thailand, he had died the previous July. Harry’s family did not receive confirmation of his death until the end of the war.



Harry Downes’ card to family of 1943 (courtesy Estelle Blackburn).

A post-war court of inquiry found that Harry had been struck down with cerebral malaria, became delirious, and died due to accidental drowning in the nearby River Kwai after disappearing from a Japanese prison camp hospital on 23 July 1943. Harry’s siblings Margaret (Blackburn) lived to 69 years, dying in 1990, and Jim lived to 94 years, passing away in 2016.

Harry Downes, Osborne Kirkton Fisher (1913-1941, former pupil of Wright, died flying), Ernest William Grigg (1917-1942, died New Guinea), Leonard Courtney Laver (1917-1943, former pupil of Wright, died flying out of Malta), John Henry

Stubbs (1918-1942, PWD cadet, died flying out of Malta), and Michael Courthorpe Haynes (1920-1942, PWD cadet, died flying) were all younger members of the WA architectural profession whose lives were cut short by the horrors of the Second World War. In 1943 Zoie Bennett lost her husband John Fryer (RAAF), and Vida Wright's fiancé Bill Philippon was killed in New Guinea.

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 Pers. comms. niece Estelle Blackburn 8-13 January 2024.
Heritage Committee review: 18 April 2024 Last updated: 18 April 2024

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