

Alex Doepel at his enlistment in 1943 (NAA A9301, 83153)

Alexander Florant Doepel (1925-2015) was born 29 March 1925 at Nurse Cripp's private hospital in Fitzroy, Victoria to Frederick 'Glen' (1895-1992) and Frederika Elizabeth ('Freda' nee Florant) Doepel (1895-1962) of 10 Beech Street, Surrey Hills. The couple had married in January 1924 at St John's Church of England in Camberwell. A Western Australian, Glen Doepel had qualified to join on the WA Pharmaceutical Register in June 1919. After Glen and Freda moved to his home State c.1926 and commenced a chemist-pharmacy business, another son, Ralph Florant was born at Hillcrest Hospital, Fremantle in 1927.

'Alex' Doepel's grandfather, Claremont-based artist-photographer Alexander Doepel (1856-1938) came with his family to WA from Victoria c.1904, and had taught art at the 'new' Scotch College campus in Swanbourne, thus it was apt for the young Doepel to attend Scotch where he gained his Junior Certificate, with passes in English, Physics, Maths, Drawing, History and Biology. In January 1942, the College Headmaster P.C. Anderson wrote a reference noting that Alex had been a pupil since February 1935, had made satisfactory progress in all his studies, and that in 1941 had completed the first year in the Leaving Course. Anderson continued: *'At the beginning of last year he was unanimously chosen by the members of the teaching staff as one of our Prefects and carried out his duties to the entire satisfaction of all concerned. Altogether he is a very fine type of boy, capable, energetic, obliging, and thoroughly trustworthy.'*

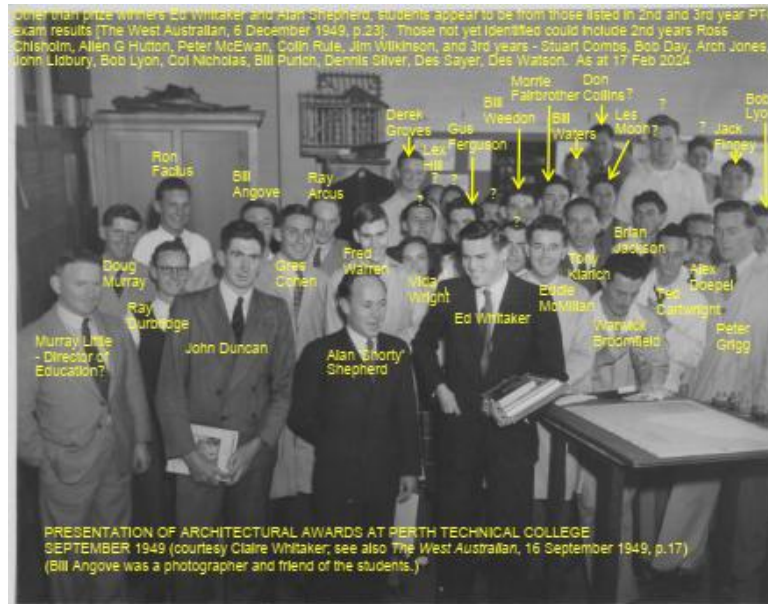
It appears that with the pressures of the time, Alex could not complete his Leaving studies and applied for enlistment for Second World War (1939-1945) service with the ground staff of the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) in October of 1942. At the time Alex's home address was with his parents at 121 Stirling Highway in Leighton, and his occupation was as a civil servant in the State Lands & Titles office, where he had worked since the beginning of 1942. Early the next year his occupation had changed to clerk in the State Crown Law Department, and in April of 1943 Alex was accepted into the RAAF and worked in various capacities, including as a technician, wireless-radio and signals operator. Following the end of the war, he was discharged in April of 1946.

Commonwealth Reconstruction Scheme (CRS) funding assisted Alex when in 1947 he elected to study architecture in the newly-founded course at Perth Technical College (PTC), under the directorship of William (Bill) H. Robertson (1905-1953). The curriculum required Alex to complete his Leaving Certificate, which he passed at examinations held in November 1947, achieving a distinction in Technical Drawing. Initially offered as a six-year diploma consisting of three years full-time and three years part-time in conjunction with work within a practice, by the time the first seven graduates of 1950 registered as architects the qualification had changed to an Associateship in Architecture. Prior to the PTC course, architects in WA were trained as indentured students within an architectural practice. They could, however, attend outside classes.

Alex Doepel and Winifred Georgiana Latham were married 20 November 1948 at St Mary's Church West Perth. Fellow CRS students at PTC, Warwick Broomfield (1925-2005) and Bob Lyon (1926-2003) acted as best man and groomsman respectively. Alex and 'Winnie' subsequently had children: Lee Alexander b.1949, Kimbal Wayne b.1951, and Karen Elizabeth b.1952.



Warwick Broomfield and Bob Lyon in the mid-1940s (NAA A9301, 441678; A9301 84545).



Alex Doepel (at right) in PTC group at Architecture Awards event in 1949 (Claire Whitaker).

Alex was admitted as a student member of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects (RAIA) in 1951. He completed his studies at PTC in 1952 within a class group that included future architects in Western Australia such as Gres Cohen, John Duncan, Morris Fairbrother, Jack Finney, Ray Leunig, John Lidbury, Eddie McMillan, Leslie Moon (died 1959 at just 34yo), Colin Nicholas, Dennis Silver, Bill Waters (died 1961, also 34yo), and John White. Doepel and the close-knit PTC community were shocked to hear of Bill Robertson's unexpected death in March 1953, aged just 48 years.



PTC School of Architecture football team 1952 (courtesy Lidbury family)

Back: Peter Bruechle, Don Collins, Jack Finney, Bob Lyon, Ross Chisholm, Bill Weedon, Alex Doepel
 M: Arch Jones, Ron Facius, Gus Ferguson, Col Nicholas, Morris Fairbrother, Scott Thompson, Bill Angove
 Front: Eddie McMillan, Bill Waters, Bill Robertson, John Lidbury, Bob Day, Ted Cartwright
 (Bill Weedon noted in 2021 that Bill Angove – a photographer – set up this image with a timer and then joined the group in the photo, taken at UWA's James Oval).

Alex Doepel and Bill Waters were fortunate to gain employment in the architectural division of the State Government's Public Works Department (PWD) on 1 December 1952, joining 1950 PTC graduates in Vin Davies (1928-2010) and Ray Strauss (1927-2013) as Grade 3 Architects. Following public service seniority, Doepel and Waters received slightly lesser salaries than Davies and Strauss at the time. In March 1953 Alex was registered with the Architects Board of Western Australia (ABWA reg no 255), and became an Associate of the RAIA. At that time, he was residing at 30 Barnfield Road in Claremont.

When Alex joined the PWD, it was led by Albert (Paddy) Clare (1894-1975). Clare served as Principal Architect of the PWD from 1930 to 1960. He was the Department's longest serving Principal Architect and from 1953 became the first one to have full responsibility for the Architectural Division without being under the direction of the Engineer in Chief or the Director of Works and Buildings. Even in the austere conditions of the post Great Depression 1930s, the PWD was busy developing facilities to support the growing State's requirements, albeit the advent of the Second World War in 1939 again restricted activities. And as WA's post-war development accelerated, he again mentored many young architects – including Alex Doepel. Clare's retirement in 1960 marked a significant moment in the history of the PWD's architectural division.



Signatures of some of the PWD Architectural Division staff at 'Paddy' Clare's retirement in 1960: at left - Alan Cann, Sydney Davis, Doug Harper, Lew Harding, Alex Doepel, James Lynas, Eduard Van Mens, Jerry Bateman, Gerard Marrett, Vin Davies, Bill Phillips, Joyce Lunnon, Arthur Smith, John Oldham, Ernest Quinn, Len Walters, John Stapleton; at right - Walter Green, Leo Clark, Henry Allom, Edward Todd, Stan Cann, Tom S. King, Gordon Finn, Eliot Dickens, Bernice Down, Charles Hall, Percy W. Rogers, Cecil Pilgrim, Reg Holmes, George Wauchope, Ken Waldron, Len Walters, Laurence Smith, Eric Jones (Paddy Clare retirement album - referenced to Public Service Lists 1959, 1962).

The 1962 Public Service List notes that Alex had already reached Architect Grade 1 status, and that the drawing office had been divided into General, Hospital, and Education Sections, led by Grade 1 architects Leo C. Clark (1912-1999), Laurence S. Smith (1918-2014), and Arthur W. Smith (1926-2022) respectively. Alex was recorded as living at 215 Herbert Street Scarborough in 1966 ABWA and in 1969 RAlA lists; and in the 1968 Public Service List he retained his architect Grade 1 status with along with other long-serving PWD professionals Hal Menzies (1922-2003) and Morrie Fairbrother (1928-2022).

With a large staff working across many complex projects, attribution of the PWD's design work that was meeting the State's rapid growth in the 1950s-1970s to singular persons is unrealistic, but Alex was one of the enduring and eventually higher-ranking State Government architects of that period. Principal PWD Architects in Doepel's time included the previously noted Paddy Clare until 1960, 1960-1967 Walter Green, 1967-1968 Leonard Walters, 1968-1980 Stanley Cann, and 1980-1984 William (Jerry) Bateman.



Aerial view of the 1970 Western Australian Herbarium and Herbarium Garden, corner of Hayman Road and George Street in Kensington (Google 2025).

Alex Doepel was the architect-in-charge of the Western Australian Herbarium building opened at Kensington in March 1970. The facility provided for the first time, ideal storage conditions for the State's collection of plants, and adequate facilities to enable botanists to study them. From 1970 until the construction of a

new herbarium in 2010 the building housed several unique collections of plants, an extensive research library and database. Since the construction of the new herbarium, the collections have been relocated to the new premises, and the Kensington facility has been decommissioned.



Western Australian Museum at Francis Street Northbridge, opened in 1972 (SLWA 343092PD).

Alex Doepel was also a major contributor to the futuristic design of the Western Australian Museum's Francis Street building, opened to the public in 1972 with three floors of exhibitions and four floors of collection and administration space. It was demolished in 2011.



Carnarvon Courthouse of 1973 at 81 Olivia Terrace (artwork by Delys Cole, WAnderland).

Doepel is credited as the architect for the Carnarvon Courthouse of 1973, one of four purpose-built courthouses constructed following the introduction of the District Courts of Western Australia Act 1969. Demolished in 2020, it was representative of the use of modernist architectural style in Perth's public buildings during the latter part of the twentieth century.

After the election of a Labor Government in WA during 1983, it was soon clear that a pre-election promise to establish a statewide water authority would result in a split-up of the PWD. There was a State Government drive to cull the number of public servants. In January 1985 a large staff contingent finished their employment with the PWD, and the department that had its origins in 1829 came to the end of its official life on 30 June 1985. A new organization named the Building Management Authority began operating under a much-reduced staff.

Alex Doepel was noted in the 1990 ABWA list at 215 Herbert Street Doubleview. Winnie Doepel died in February 2013 at Leederville aged 86, and Alex passed away on 25 April 2015 at Leederville aged 90 years. Alex's mother Freda had died in 1962 at North Fremantle aged 67 years, and his father Glen in 1992 at East Fremantle, aged 97. A legendary figure in North Fremantle, where Doepel Street and Doepel Jetty are named after him, Glen was on the WA Pharmaceutical Register continuously from 1919.

A fellow PWD architect, Bob Gadsdon, recalled at the time of Alex's passing: *Alex Doepel was a senior architect in the PWD. He did a great deal of work for the Museum and the Agricultural Department. Amongst government architects he was a significant influence and mentor to younger members of the profession.*

Alex's son Kim became an architect (ABWA reg no 1251). Kim recalls that his father was responsible for several buildings at the South Perth Zoo.

References:

'Marriages', *Argus*, 16 February 1924, p.13 (Frederick Glen Doepel to Freda Elizabeth Florant at St John's Church Camberwell Victoria).

'Births', *The Age*, 25 April 1925, p.7 (Alexander Florant at Nurse Cripp's private hospital Fitzroy).

'Births', *The West Australian*, 19 July 1927, p.1 (Ralph Florant at Hillcrest Hospital Fremantle).

'Deaths', *The West Australian*, 16 December 1938, p.1 (of Alexander snr at Claremont).

NAA: A9301, 83153; DOEPEL ALEXANDER FLORANT : Service Number - 83153 : Date of birth - 29 Mar 1925 : POB - FITZROY VIC : POE - PERTH WA : NOK - DOEPEL FREDERICK.

'Results of the Leaving Examination', *The West Australian*, 9 January 1948, p.7.

'Marriage', *The West Australian*, 22 December 1948, p.1 (Alexander Florant Doepel married Winifred Georgiana Latham 20 Nov at West Perth).

'Wedding Bells', *Swan Express*, 25 November 1948, p.3 (best man Warwick Broomfield and groomsman Bob Lyon attending Doepel-Latham wedding at St Mary's Church West Perth).

'Births', *The West Australian*, 5 December 1949, p.1 (Lee Alexander at St Andrews).

'Institute Notes', *The Architect*, June 1951, p.13 (admitted as student member of RAIA).

'Births', *The West Australian*, 8 August 1951, p.22 (Kimbal Wayne at St Ives).
 'Board Notes', *The Architect*, March 1952, p.18 (registration approved).
 'Births', *The West Australian*, 28 October 1952, p.16 (Karen Elizabeth at Devonleigh).
 'Institute Notes', *The Architect*, June 1953, p.17 (admitted as Associate member of RAIA).
 1954, 1955, 1956, 1959, 1962, and 1968 Public Service Lists in the *WA Government Gazette*.
 'The Western Australian Herbarium and Herbarium Garden', HCWA place no 04800.
 'Carnarvon Courthouse', HCWA place no 10942.
 Pers. comm. Bob Gadsdon April 2015.

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