F.W. Steere
(Battye, J.S., *Cyclopedia of Western Australia*, Vol.1, 1912, p.725)

Frederick Walter Steere (1868-1938) was born 18 August 1868 at Richmond in London, and educated at the Hope House School, Richmond. Fred worked under the direction of his father Alfred S. Steere, described in the 1881 census as a mechanic carpenter, prior to Fred's departure for Australia in 1888. In 1912 autobiographical notes published in the *Cyclopedia of Western Australia*, Fred recorded that after 'about nine months at Sydney he proceeded to Queensland, where he was identified with station life for three years'. For reasons that will become apparent, Steere may have been less than forthcoming regarding his early days in Australia, and he may also have worked within the Public Works Department at Brisbane. Subsequently he spent periods of time in Melbourne and Adelaide in the early 1890s, although Adelaide is not mentioned in his 1912 notes. With the desperate economic circumstances of the early 1890s on the east coast, one could very kindly state that young Steere may have 'fallen in with a bad sort'. Fred appeared in an Adelaide court in 1891, found utilising an alias *Frank Stevenson* and brought back from Brisbane by police, charged with being an absconding debtor.

Steere arrived in Western Australia during 1896 or 97, and initially worked in the Bunbury area for architect Thomas B. Jackson, designer of the Municipal Buildings opened by Premier John Forrest in March 1897. By late 1897 Steere had established himself as an architect at Bunbury, and was subsequently responsible for the design of many important buildings. With a steady workload, Fred's younger brother Edward Cecil Steere (1881-1904) travelled from England in 1903 and joined the practice as an assistant architect. Suffering from 'consumption' (tuberculosis), Edward was forced to leave for the drier air of the north-west of the State in April 1904, but his health did not improve, and returning to Fremantle to be met by Fred, died in August.

Fred Steere took a very active part in municipal and social affairs at Bunbury, and served ratepayers as a councillor for some years, twice holding office as Mayor. He occupied the office of Chairman of the Bunbury Harbour Board, was a Justice of the Peace for the district, and filled the post of Secretary to the Chamber of Commerce being a member of the committee of that body. Steere and another English-born émigré, Eustace Cohen, were significant pre-First World War practitioners in the south-west of Western Australia.

Stating his profession as a builder, Steere married Annie Wells at Essendon, Victoria in September 1890, and they eventually had a family of five sons and two daughters. Frederick Alfred Steere was born 1892 at Port Adelaide, South Australia; Edith Emma born 1894; Stanley Herbert 1898; Sydney Frederick Wells 1901; Walter Cecil Wells (Ted) 1904; Evelyn Keith (Keith) 1908; and Doris Anne (Babs) 1913, the last five children all born at Bunbury.

With some previous voluntary military forces experience, Steere enlisted for First World War service with the Australian Imperial Forces in February 1917, stating that he was 44 years old (he would actually be 49 that year). Leaving his wife and the younger children at their Bunbury residence, Fred embarked at Melbourne for England on 30 October 1917, unaware of the death of his son Stan at Passchendaele, Belgium two days previous. Steere was active with the army engineers in France during 1918. The loss of his son and the rigours of Western Front service soon took their toll - by 7 November 1918, an army medical report noted Fred was suffering from 'general weakness and rheumatism' with some cardiac irregularity, and would be 'unfit to stand a winter in England'. Invalided, at Christmas 1918 Steere returned from England on the hospital transport *Takada*, and after discharge from a Fremantle Army hospital in February 1919, was able to return to practice in Bunbury.

At the start of the twentieth century, it was not unusual for architects in regional towns such as Bunbury or Geraldton to supplement their income with other business activities. Steere worked in other roles, including as an agent for insurance companies, and as secretary for a building society. None-the-less, Steere's primary practice was architecture, and when the *Architects Act of Western Australia 1921* received formal assent in 1922, he duly registered (no.20) with the Architects Board of WA.

As with the majority of late nineteenth and early twentieth century buildings in Bunbury, most of Steere's designs have been significantly modified over time, and the original Federation-era styles are difficult for most to visualise without the benefit of original photographs. Places identified on the Heritage Council of Western Australia database to have been designed by Steere include: Rechabite Hall (fmr) at 13 Prinsep Street, Bunbury (1898), a single-storey brick building; J.H. Carr's Chemist & Dentist (fmr) at 76-78 Victoria Street, Bunbury (1903), a two-storey building with a decorated parapet and corner cupola; Lyric Theatre (Weiss' Theatre) at 73-77 Victoria Street, Bunbury (1904), with remodelling by W.T. Leighton in 1937; *Bishopscourt*, 15 Cross Street, Bunbury (1905) a large single-storey Federation Queen Anne style house, with alterations and additions by Jack Ochiltree carried out in 1917-18 during Steere's war service, renovated again in 1928 to Steere's design; St George's Anglican Church, Boyanup (1906), a modified Federation Gothic style church; 153 Stirling Street, Bunbury (1907), a two-storey house in Federation Queen Anne style, built as Steere's home; another house at 33 Stirling Street, Bunbury (1912), of weatherboard and iron with brick chimneys; and 22 Wellington St, Bunbury (1922), another of Steere's homes in Bunbury; Steere designed St Joseph's School in 1920 (demolished 1982) in the style of the nearby convent.

Other buildings designed by Steere include:

North's Buildings - shops & offices in Victoria Street, Bunbury (1897); Waterloo Agricultural Hall (1898); *Bunbury Herald* newspaper offices Victoria Street (1900); a brick and stone Church of England at Capel – design not built (1901); a coffee palace opposite the *Herald* offices for J. Nuttall (1903); municipal baths for Bunbury (1904); Sailors' Rest corner of Wollaston & Ommaney Streets, Bunbury (1905); St Mary's Church, Dardanup (1906); Bedford Hall, Arthur Street, Bunbury for Church of England (1907); 2 brick shops Forrest Street, Collie (1909); a skating rink at Collie (1910); St Paul's Church, Bridgetown (1911); *Austral Chambers*, Stephen Street, Bunbury (1913); Congregational Manse, Bunbury (1913); and an abattoir for Fouracre & Wass (1913).

Listed in *Wises* directories as an architect at Bunbury until 1934, suggesting he may have retired at around 65 years, Steere died on the family's farm *Yamba* near Dudinin on 11 June 1938, aged 69 years.

References:

'An Absconding Debtor', *South Australian Chronicle*, 10 January 1891, pp.11-12.

'Unlawfully Quitting the Province', *South Australian Register*, 28 February 1891, p.4.

'Insolvency Court', *South Australian Register*, 2 May 1891, p.3.

'North's Buildings', *Bunbury Herald*, 28 December 1897, p.3 (shops & offices Victoria Street).

'Local and General', *Bunbury Herald*, 11 January 1898, p.3 (office move into Victoria Street).

'Architectural Bunbury', *Bunbury Herald*, 22 September 1898, p.3 (for Gibbs, Cook, Sampson).

'Opening of Waterloo Agricultural Hall', *Bunbury Herald*, 3 November 1898, pp. 2-3.

'Local and General', *Bunbury Herald*, 21 August 1900, p.2 (*Bunbury Herald* offices Victoria St).

'I. O. Rechabites', *Bunbury Herald*, 23 February 1901, p.3 (opening of new Rechabite Hall).

'Capel, Thursday', *Bunbury Herald*, 7 December 1901, p.3 (brick & stone Church of England).

'An Ornament to Bunbury', *Bunbury Herald*, 5 October 1903, p.3 (coffee palace for J. Nuttall).

'Personal', *Bunbury Herald*, 20 April 1904, p.2 (brother leaving for North-West due to ill health).

'Death of Mr Steere', *Bunbury Herald*, 24 August 1904, p.2 (death of Edward at Fremantle).

'Theatre for Bunbury', *Bunbury Herald*, 29 August 1904, p.2 (Victoria &Symmons Sts for Weiss).

'New Baths for Bunbury', *Bunbury Herald*, 5 October 1904, p.3.

'Sailors' Rest', *Bunbury Herald*, 30 January 1905, p.3 (hall cnr Wollaston & Ommaney Streets).

'St Mary's Dardanup', *Bunbury Herald*, 14 May 1906, p.2 (laying of foundation stone).

'Consecration of Boyanup Church', *Bunbury Herald*, 25 May 1906, p.3 (completed church).

'Removal', *Bunbury Herald*, 25 July 1906, p.2 (move to offices Stephen St, sec. Building Soc).

'Bedford Hall', *Bunbury Herald*, 29 January 1907, p.3 (for Church of England) [was in Arthur St].

'Collie News', *Bunbury Herald*, 2 February 1909, p.2 (2 brick shops Forrest Street Collie).

'Collie Enterprise', *Bunbury Herald*, 11 June 1910, p.3 (skating rink).

'St Paul's Church, Bridgetown', *Bunbury Herald*, 1 February 1911, p.3 (laying foundation stone).

Battye, J.S., 'Frederick Walter Steere', *Cyclopedia of Western Australia*, Hussey & Gillingham for the Cyclopedia Co. Adelaide, 1912, Vol.1, p.725.

'New Buildings in Bunbury', *Bunbury Herald*, 1 February 1913, p.7 (Austral Chambers, houses).

'Opening of the Congregational Manse', *Bunbury Herald*, 9 December 1913, p.1.

'New Abattoir', *Bunbury Herald*, 10 May 1913, p.4 (opening ceremony for Fouracre & Wass).

'Public Notice', *Bunbury Herald*, 15 March 1919, p.4 (resume practice Building Soc Chambers).

'Life of Service Ends', *The West Australian*, 15 June 1938, p.10 (obituary).

HCWA Register documentation for place 18566, *Cathedral Church of St Boniface and Bishopscourt*, 29 October 2010.

STEERE Frederick Walter : Service Number – 4288, NAA series B2455, barcode 8089436.

STEERE Stanley Herbert : Service Number – 4544, NAA series B2455, barcode 8089437.
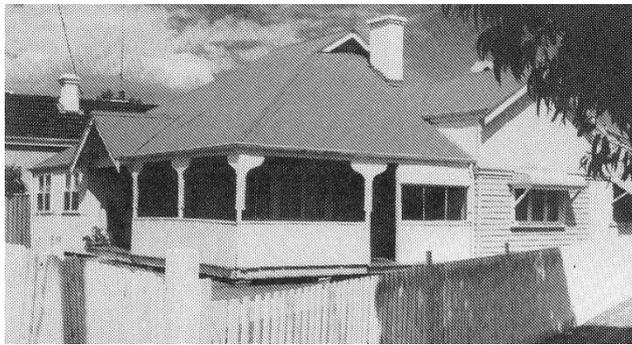
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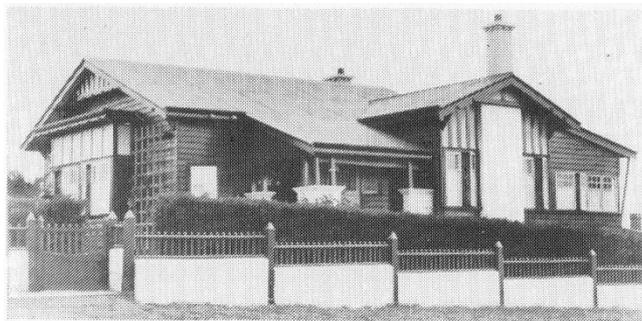
Citation details:

Taylor, Dr John J., 'Frederick Walter Steere (1868-1938)', Western Australian Architect Biographies, http://www.architecture.com.au/i-cms?page=13453, accessed DATE.

153 Stirling Street, Bunbury (Molyneux, Ian, *Looking Around Perth,* 1981, p.100)

33 Stirling Street, Bunbury (Molyneux, Ian, *Looking Around Perth,* 1981, p.102)

22 Wellington Street, Bunbury (Molyneux, Ian, *Looking Around Perth,* 1981, p.104)

Lyric Theatre (Weiss' Theatre) 73-77 Victoria Street, Bunbury (Google 2013)