



John Mercer (*Phi*, 1950, p.19)

John Duart Mercer (1923-1988) was born 1 February 1923 at Nurse Ashe's in Wasley Street North Perth, one of twin sons to Benjamin and Edith Alice (nee McLean) Mercer of 550 Fitzgerald Street North Perth. Ben Mercer came to WA in the gold-rush 1890s, establishing the South Australian produce merchants Silbert Sharp & Bishop at Kalgoorlie, and then forming his own fruit and vegetable merchandising business at the Perth Markets. Ben and Edith had married at the West Perth Presbyterian Church in March 1913. John's siblings were Janet b.1914, Marjorie b.1915, Donald b.1917, Nancy b.1920, Norman (John's twin) b.1923 and Robert b.1930.

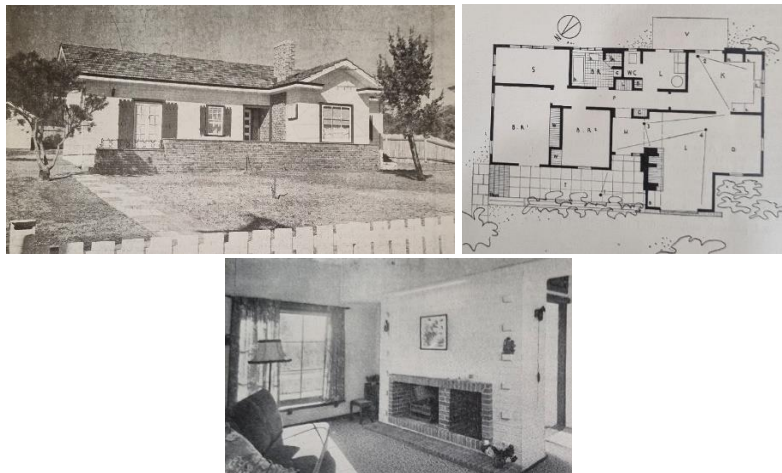
John was the only son who did not follow his father and work for Ben Mercer Pty Ltd. Instead, after completing his Junior at Wesley College in 1938, he studied architecture, being articled to Kenneth Charles Duncan (1898-1983) in December 1939. Duncan was President of the Royal Institute of Architects of Western Australia during 1939-1940, and was joined in partnership by Cyril James Stephen (1893-1974) in 1940. Following the outbreak of the Second World War (1939-1945), Ken Duncan enlisted in the Royal Australian Engineers. John Mercer's studies were also interrupted by army service during the War, enlisting with the engineers from 1942; by June 1945 he was with the Public Works Department in Perth on hospital design work.

With the effects of the war diminishing, John again joined with Ken Duncan and Cyril Stephen in the work of the practice. A 1947 Royal Australian Institute of Architects exhibition catalogue lists four residences by Duncan & Stephen, at First Avenue Canning Bridge, Labouchere Road South Perth, Drew Road Applecross [for John's sister Nancy Johnson], and Winmarley Street Floreat Park – suggesting the firm had modest post-war projects on the drawing boards.



The official party at the T-Square Ball in 1944: back row Commander V.L. Vinden, Corporal John D. Mercer, Lieutenant-Governor Sir James Mitchell; front Lady Mitchell and Section Officer Jan Rae (courtesy Jan's niece Jeannette Rae, published in *Western Mail*, 13 July 1944, p.11).

Mercer was awarded the E.G. Cohen Medal for 1947, and he passed the Architects Board of Western Australia examinations in the same year, hence registering in early 1948 (reg no 189). At this time he was admitted as a partner in the firm which then became known as Duncan, Stephen and Mercer. Ken Duncan's son, John Kenneth Duncan (1928-2005), came into the business in 1956. Ronald Bodycoat joined in 1979 and carried on the practice into the 1990s.



'Applecross House' street view, plan and interior (*The Architect*, June 1949, cover and p.18)

John Mercer was responsible for many developments and of particular interest was his work for the Silver Chain Nursing Association (who named their complex at Hilton Park in his honour), the Alfred Carson Hospital, Hilton Park Hospital, Wright Street East Perth offices and numerous country and district bush nursing centres. He also carried out work for the Spastic Welfare Association, the Crippled Children's Society and was involved in the development of hostels and treatment centres – including Epsom, Kentucky, Selby, Hove and Brighton for what was then known as the Mental Health Department. There were further significant contributions for various local governments, including the council and administration centres for the cities of South Perth and Gosnells.



Fritz Kos' 1962 photo of Duncan Stephen & Mercer designed residence at Katherine Street Floreat Park (SLWA 340,535PD).

John contracted cancer and retired in 1975, also to care for his ailing mother and to enjoy golf and travel. During his working days he was involved with community service work. He was a founding member, and later secretary of Floreat Apex Club, and a member of West Perth Rotary. He continued his interest in the army for several years as a Captain in the CMF, based at Karrakatta. Professionally, he was for a time a member of the Council of the WA Chapter of the RAIA. He joined the Board of the Silver Chain and served as president for five years.



A Toodyay stone feature wall of the Duncan Stephen & Mercer designed ANZ Bank at 104 Stirling Highway Nedlands is likely to still be in place (1965 - SLWA 340768PD, Google 2022)

John Mercer did not marry, and lived at 550 Fitzgerald Street up until the 1970s. Revered by the wider Mercer family, who called him 'Skinny', in later years John lived with his mother at a house he built in Tuart Street Applecross, until her passing in 1982, and he died 16 January 1988, aged 64 years.

References:

- 'Articles of Pupilage', Mercer and Duncan, indenture dated 18 December 1939, RAIA (WA). NAA B883, WX28720; MERCER JOHN DUART : Service Number - WX28720 : DOB - 01 Feb 1923 : POB - NORTH PERTH WA : POE - PERTH WA : Next of Kin – BENJAMIN
- 'Students' Notes', *The Architect*, June 1945, p.12.
- 'Expansible House', *The Architect*, March 1949, p.22.
- John Mercer, 'Festival of Britain and South Bank Exhibition', *The Architect*, Sep 1951, pp.11-13.

'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 27 June 1953, p.28 (brick produce store Fitzgerald Streets Perth for Mercer Traders Pty Ltd).

'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 21 November 1953, p.36, (church Canning Highway Applecross for Trustees Trinity Congregational Church).

'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 1 May 1954, p.42 (residence lot 66 Cliff Way Claremont).

Pers. comm. Bob Mercer 24 November 2022.

SROWA files noting commissions to Duncan, Stephen & Mercer:

Forrestfield Primary School - additions 1969 /70 - AU WA S82 cons1562 1969/0386 Item 1969-04-17 - 1970-12-11

Selby Community Clinic Shenton Park - Child Minding Centre - erection. AU WA S82 cons1562 1969/0496 Item 1968-06-18 - 1971-04-20

Homes and Institutions - Stoneville - Hillston Child Welfare Home - Additions 1969/70 AU WA S82 cons1562 1969/1561 Item 1969-11-06 - 1971-06-24

Forrestfield Primary School - Additions 1970/71 - AU WA S82 cons1568 1970/0592 Item 1970-04-10 - 1972-04-24

Selby Community Centre (Shenton Park) - Extensions - AU WA S82 cons1568 1970/1438 Item 1970-10-08 - 1972-07-20

Mental Health Services - Kentucky Hostel 48/50 Great Eastern Highway Rivervale - AU WA S82 cons1562 1969/0431 Item 1969-04-15 - 1972-07-21

Boyup Brook Junior High School - Upgrading Existing Laboratory - AU WA S82 cons1608 1972/0315 Item 1972-03-23 - 1976-06-18

Beckenham Primary School - Additions 1973/74 - Library, Resource - AU WA S82 cons1608 1973/0470 Item 1973-04-30 - 1976-10-22

Forrestfield Primary - Library - AU WA S82 cons1608 1974/1900 Item 1974-11-21 - 1976-12-01

Beckenham Primary School - Additions 1973/74 - Staff Toilets, Staffroom - AU WA S82 cons1608 1973/0471 Item 1973-04-30 - 1976-12-09

Boyup Brook Junior High School - Additions 1973/74 - Library, Resource - AU WA S82 cons1608 1973/0469 Item 1973-04-30 - 1977-03-01

Forrestfield Primary School - 6 Classrooms, Toilet & Dental Therapy Unit - AU WA S82 cons1608 1974/0445 Item 1974-03-12 - 1977-10-17

Mental Health Services - Bullcreek Hostel - erection - AU WA S82 cons5639 1978/0140 Item 1978-02-08 - 1979-06-13

Mental Health Services - Innaloo - Sussex Hostel - AU WA S82 cons1608 1974/1067 Item 1974-06-18 - 1979-08-21

Mental Health Services - Bullcreek - Hostel - erection - AU WA S82 cons5956 1979/0895 Item 1979-05-18 - 1981-06-23

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