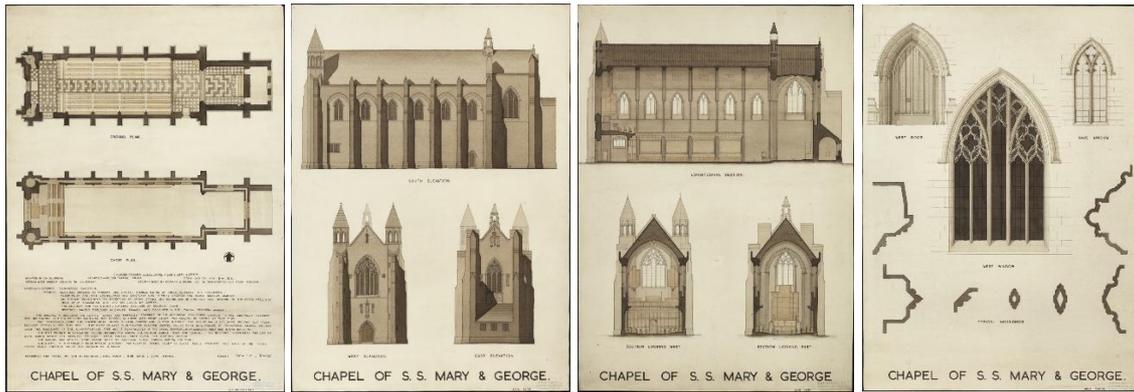




Len Buckeridge c.1970 (bgc.com.au)

Leonard (Len) Walter Buckeridge (1936-2014) was born 15 June 1936 to parents Richard Leonard (1909-1998) and Winifred (nee McCallum, 1911-1993) Buckeridge, who had married as teenagers at Perth in 1928. At the time of Len's birth his parents were listed at 19 Harvey Street Victoria Park, later living at 12 Streatley Road Victoria Park, then in the 1950s residing at 102 Webster Street Nedlands. Len had siblings Josephine b.1929 [m. Hawkins], Stanley Richard b.1932, and Margaret Hilda b.1942 [m. Halcombe]. Len's father Richard ('Dick') had been born at Calne in Wiltshire, England and arrived at Western Australia in 1911 as an infant with parents Walter (1878-1954) and Albertine (1873-1944). Walter was an optician who had qualified in England before trading in Murray Street Perth as 'Mr B the Optician', and Dick studied at Melbourne in the late 1920s to join his father in the optical business by 1932 as 'Mr B Junior'. It was a family-run business for four generations of Buckeridges from 1911 to 1989, when it was sold as a going concern.

When Walter Buckeridge died in June 1954, he left an estate of nearly £75 000, a considerable sum at the time, and Dick, as the new Mr B, was a major beneficiary. Thus, we can surmise that although not privileged, through his family Len had a comfortable upbringing. He attended Perth Boys School in James Street 1949-1951, and then Perth Modern School 1952-1953, but failed to matriculate mainly due to a weakness in mathematics. Taking a job as a builder's laborer, Len managed to undertake further study and pass his Leaving Certificate at Leederville Technical College, enabling entrance into the Associateship in Architecture course at Perth Technical College (PTC), commencing in 1956. The main lecturers in Len's time at PTC were department head Senior Bolland (mid-1954 to mid-1958, replaced in 1960 by Clarence Bunn), Arnold Camerer, Allan Douglas, Margaret Pitt Morison, Ron Dyer, Toni Solarski, and John White.



Drawings of the Chapel of St Mary & St George at Guildford, 1957. Plan by Len Buckeridge, elevations by Neil Wood, sections by Bob Gare, details by June Thong (SLWA b2806475). Thong won the PTC measured drawing prize in 1957 (*The Architect*, December 1957, p.13).

During 1958, Len and fellow PTC student Judith Caroline Lyon (1938-2018) were married. Judy and Len then had five children together from early 1959 through to 1967. Noted by colleagues as highly intelligent and brilliant in her work, Judy was soon drawing-up houses to raise money for the growing family whilst Len was still enrolled as a student, and deserves some credit for the instigation of the Buckeridge development empire in 1959. In his final year of studies – 1960 – Len won a James Hardie Prize for his thesis 'The Economical House'.

Having successfully completed the course, on 7 February 1961 Buckeridge registered with the Architects Board of Western Australia (ABWA reg no 354). He had graduated from PTC with a class that included other architects in WA: 1960 E.G. Cohen Medal winner Tony Ednie-Brown (350), Bruce Tomlinson (352), 1961 W.H. Robertson Memorial Travel Grant winner Ian Watson (355), 1960 Morawetz Prize winner Neil Wood (356), 1957 Margaret Pitt Morison history essay prize winner Robert Gare (357), Abraham Ashbil (358), and 1958 W.G. Bennett Prize winner; Margot Smalpage-Watson (359).



The L.W. Buckeridge-designed Perth Flying Squadron Yacht Club clubhouse of 1962 onward is located on The Esplanade at Dalkeith (pfsyc.com.au).

Whilst studying at PTC, Len had been working at architects Krantz & Sheldon. From the late 1930s until the 1960s, the firm had become synonymous with the design of flats, or apartment blocks, and is reputed to have designed and built around 90% of all the flats constructed in Perth during that period. Thus, when Len began his architectural practice designing a variety of projects, it was particularly strong in low-cost housing, including blocks of flats that he developed with himself as client and architect.



Stein House, 30 Beamish Avenue Mount Pleasant (*The Architect*, December 1962, pp.38-39)

Although becoming an Associate of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects (RAIA) in 1961, Buckeridge was not one to mix in the formality of Institute matters, and is not well-represented in the RAIA (WA) periodical *The Architect*. However, one of his early projects, a residence for the Stein family at Mount Pleasant, was featured in 1962 and accompanying text notes that *'this house was built to accommodate the activities of a daughter who is a student architect, and her parents who required separate and more formal space for living than she'*. The student mentioned was Aija Stein-Thomas (ABWA reg 502), in future years to be a co-founder of renowned health-care architects Silver Thomas Hanley. Aija worked for Buckeridge for a short period, and remembers 'taking drawings out to print in the sunshine'! Aija recalls that the residence was quite innovative for its time, noting that Len's design work was of high quality: *'There were many clever ideas in that house that impacted on my thinking and approach to architecture.'*

After returning from travel and employment in the United Kingdom, Len's former classmate Bob Gare (1938-) worked for L.W. Buckeridge Architects from September 1964 through to c.1971. Gare recalls that Buckeridge invested in a

number of hotels in the 1960-1970s, including the Belmont Hotel, Freemasons Hotel Midland, Old Melbourne; and at Fremantle, the Cleopatra and Orient Hotels - noting that Len introduced rock bands to playing in Perth 'pubs' and that throughout his career had followed the fortunes of 'baby boomers'. Other more mundane projects included the Kwinana Police & Citizens Youth Club of 1970.

Bob Gare noted that Len would work hard on saving pennies – citing an example of Len spending a whole morning pricing alternatives for a new set of tyres for a car, just to ensure not having paid any more than was necessary. Len disliked paying other design consultants, other than structural engineers (Mike Carrigg, Bill Ullinger) who were encouraged to embrace his strivings for economy.

In 2014 Philip Schubert made note of an early Buckeridge project and client:

I remember one of Len's very first jobs as an architect. He designed and supervised the construction of a block of 8 flats, "Robyn Flats", after my cousin Robyn. They were built at 263 Lockhart Street Como in 1965 for my aunty Daphne Mewett. ... She used him many times over the next few years, and in hindsight probably gave him his first breaks to create his empire. She was always talking about him, and I met him many times in the late 1960's while he continued to build "flats" in South Perth.

Len's daughter Rachel later recalled Buckeridge family times of the 1960-1970s:

My father built a house on Garden Island with his brother Stanley, for the use of their immediate families. Their sisters, Jo and Margaret were always included in times spent there. We had no electricity and a kerosene fridge. We had a room at the back which had thirteen beds in a row for all the cousins of my generation. We children could roam freely, on the land and in the sea. This is one of the most memorable things about my father. It taught us all to love country.

Len mentored many fellow young architects in his 'innovative', sometimes controversial, ways of business during the 1960 and 1970s. An earlier PTC graduate, Brian Klopper (1937-2020, reg no 333) returned to Perth in 1968 after time overseas, where he was encouraged by his friend Gare to join him working at L.W. Buckeridge & Associates. Len's practice was already renowned for purely commercially-driven design, with less regard for aestheticism, and staff soon learnt the tough principles of minimising cost and maximising developer value.



L.W. Buckeridge projects: Wellington Court flats at 31 Wellington Street Mosman Park, c.1971 ;
Offices 322 Hay Street Subiaco, c.1971 (SLWA 160000PD, 160001PD - Fritz Kos).

Bevan Knott (1937-2024, reg no 415) returned from overseas to Perth around 1968, where he joined Forbes & Fitzhardinge Architects; and then with Ian Oldfield (1946-, reg no 606), worked running the Buckeridge architectural office for a period while Len was away overseas c.1972. Other PTC graduates in Colin Moore (1938-, reg no 413) and Walter Hunter (1934-, reg no 342) also worked in the Buckeridge practice at various times. John McKenzie (1944-, reg no 628) came from Melbourne to start at the same time that Ian Oldfield came from the PWD (after Len paid out Ian's PWD cadetship bond) c.1969. Moore moved to Summerhayes & Associates around 1968, Hunter started his own practice in 1972, and Knott and Oldfield moved on from LWB & Associates around the end of 1973. Klopper and Gare worked in a partnership from the early 1970s to 1979; Oldfield and Knott joined together in a practice 1974 to 1986. McKenzie came back in 1974 after three years away overseas, and then virtually ran Len's architectural office for the remainder of his career. The name of the Buckeridge architectural office (and thus on the drawings etc) changed to John McKenzie & Associates in the 1990s, primarily to diffuse issues with building and construction unions. John retired in 2018.

Avis Clements was another long-term part of the Buckeridge design team, primarily doing the interiors: *I worked for Len for 31 years, starting in 1976 and retiring in June of 2007. I worked in the Architectural Office - all those years working alongside him and John Mack on many projects, from flat developments to shopping centres, office buildings etc. Len and I had a great relationship particularly in the years in which he treated me like one of his daughters. I had*

nothing but admiration for him both in what he was achieving and the support and confidence he had in me, despite on many occasions calling me into his office and saying he didn't agree with some of the things I was doing. However, he never stopped me.

In 1974, Len entered the project-building market to build low-cost detached houses as Dalfield Homes. As an architect and also a developer, Buckeridge trod the thin line of design responsibility to the public, running afoul of the Architects Board of Western Australia around 1975, when the Board sought to have Len deregistered. Research into Board meeting minutes of the time would be required to understand the issues further, but it appears that Len worked out that ABWA 'ran on a shoestring', and by out-spending the Board on lawyers' fees, eventually managed to win a long litigious battle to have his registration continued, although it was suspended for a period.



Clinton Court, built in the 1970's, corner of Loma and Broome Streets Cottesloe (Google 2026).

Illustrating 'bread and butter' projects of the practice into the 1970s, the WA State Records Office has note of some of L.W. Buckeridge & Partners' educational design work: North Balga Primary School – Resource Centre, 6 Classrooms & Covered Assembly 1969-1976; Boyanup Primary School - Additions 1970-1971; Carnarvon Senior High School – Additions 1971-1973, Canteen 1972, 2 Classrooms Office & Store 1972, Commerce and Economics Rooms 1973-1974; York Junior High School - Resource Centre 1972; Wyalkatchem Junior High School - Resource Centre 1972; Cunderdin Junior High School - Additions 1973-1974 - Library, Resource Centre, 2 Rooms, Toilets & Administration 1973-1974; Dalwallinu Junior High School - Resource Centre 1979; Montrose Primary School - 6 Classrooms & Resource Centre 1974-1977; Boyanup Primary School - Staff Toilets & Store & Drainage 1974; and Morawa Junior High School - Resource Centre 1975-1979.

In the early 1970s Len had begun buying into manufacturing businesses, with one of his first ventures being the acquisition of Precision Mouldings, makers of fibreglass basins and the like. Buckeridge evolved that business into the highly successful Precision Marine. He began selling off some of his 2 500 odd flats to buy other building suppliers, with his amalgamated companies eventually known as the Buckeridge Group of Companies (BGC) from 10 July 1994, touted as Australia's largest home builder.

The design office of L.W. Buckeridge & Associates was located in the 1960s at Ord Street West Perth, and then in the 1970s onward at Mount Street Perth, where they remained in redeveloped premises under the John McKenzie banner. Driven by Len's vision, BGC developed multiple businesses to manufacture its own construction materials and building products. As the company grew, its capabilities increased and it diversified further from residential into the commercial sector, becoming a vertically integrated construction company.



The BGC Centre at 28 The Esplanade Perth was built from 1984 (www.greenstreetnews.com).

Len remained the dominating force in BGC, with the company involved in many big construction projects around the WA capital in the 1990s and 2000s. BGC helped build the Perth Arena, the redevelopment of the WACA Ground, the Northbridge police complex, the WA Athletics Stadium and the Armadale Health Campus. Consistent with his philosophy to ensure self-sufficiency in business, Buckeridge spent ten years planning a private port at James Point near Kwinana, expected to cut the cost of imported materials and permit easier export of products that BGC produced. After protracted and difficult political negotiations failed, he initiated a lawsuit against the State Government, which eventually led to a confidential settlement some years after his death.



Len Buckeridge in the 2000s (WA News).

Len Buckeridge died of a heart attack at his home in Mosman Park on 11 March 2014, aged 77 years. He was survived by his five children with Judy - Lise b.1959, Rachel b.1960, Andrew b.1962, Sam b.1966, Joshua b.1967; and his de facto partner of forty years Siok Puay Koh, also known as Tootsie Ambrose, mother of sixth child Julian. Judith Lyon died in December 2018, and Andrew Buckeridge passed away in May 2025.



Tootsie Ambrose with the six children of Len Buckeridge in 2014 (theaustralian.com.au).

Len Buckeridge is amongst the most notable of the 120-plus architects who graduated from PTC between 1950 and 1967, when the course was transferred to the Western Australian Institute of Technology. Always a gifted businessman, Len's focus gradually shifted from architectural practice to construction, and his determination to ensure his own supply lines to his building works resulted in an incredibly successful conglomerate during the later Twentieth and early Twenty-First Centuries. Buckeridge amassed the greatest fortune of any architect in Australia to date - the 2010 Business Review Weekly list claimed a value of \$2.24 billion. Many educators stress that the great breadth of an architectural education equips individuals with skills that can lead to success in many allied fields, and Len Buckeridge's story is a fabulous example of this premise.

This article focuses on Len Buckeridge's relationship with the architecture of WA. His more 'colourful' background stories of fighting with trade unions and others who challenged his business ambitions, his 'creative' ways of circumventing regulation, his generous philanthropy, and complex family issues, perhaps remain to be documented in a comprehensive biography.

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