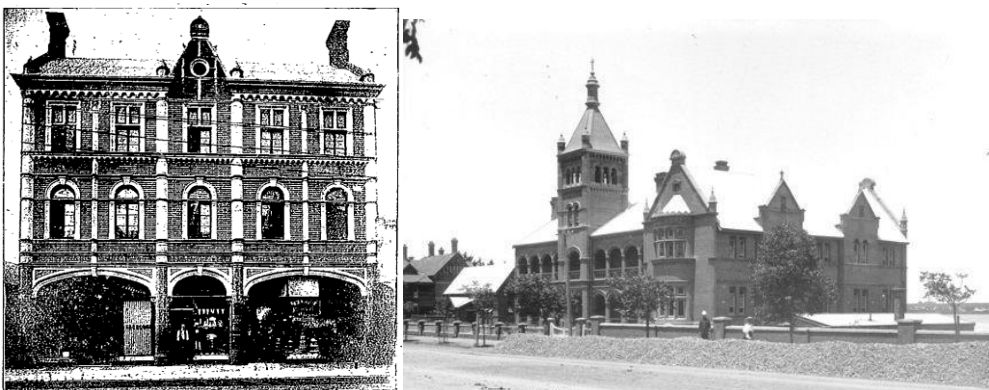


Michael Cavanagh (SLSA, c.1897; *TCIWA*, 1901, p.394; *The Architect*, June 1941, p.8)

Michael Francis Cavanagh (1860-1941) was born near Beechworth, Victoria in August 1860. The son of a builder, Cavanagh received architectural training c.1882-1886 in the service of the South Australian government. Resigning the post at Adelaide, he moved to London in 1887 and obtained experience from short periods within the office-studios of John Slater, Frank Baggallay & Walter Millard. Undertaking further studies, Cavanagh passed examinations entitling him to associate-ship with the Royal Institute of British Architects in 1888.

Having gained greater knowledge, he returned to his adopted State and re-entered the SA Government Architect's Department, eventually rising to Chief Draughtsman. Cavanagh entered into private practice in 1891, and came to the gold boom State of Western Australia in 1895. By May of 1895 he was calling tenders for the construction of his design for 'Eagle Chambers' in Hay Street, Perth – noting that his other office was in the Eagle Chambers in Adelaide. Michael had the intention to set up a 'branch' practice in Perth for his younger brother James. Finding there was so great an extent of work available, Cavanagh closed the SA office and settled permanently in WA.



Eagle Chambers at Hay Street Perth; Christian Brothers College, 1 St George's Terrace Perth
(*The Western Mail*, Christmas 1897, p.67; Wikipedia)

With other prominent architects of the period, Cavanagh was instrumental at a meeting of May 1896 that formalised the West Australian Institute of Architects (WAIA): *A general meeting of practising architects was held yesterday afternoon at the Criterion Hotel for the purpose of forming an Institute of Architects in Western Australia. Mr G.T. Poole was voted in the chair, and Mr M.F. Cavanagh proposed the first resolution viz: "That an Institute of architects be formed in Western Australia". Mr G.R. Johnstone [Johnson] seconded, and the resolution was carried unanimously. The election of officers was then proceeded with, with the following results: Mr G.T. Poole was elected president, Mr M.F. Cavanagh vice-president, Mr J. Talbot Hobbs treasurer, Mr Clarence Wilkinson hon. secretary; and the following gentlemen were elected members of the council: Messrs W.A. Drake, H.S. Trigg, G.R. Johnstone [Johnson], E.H.D. Smith, A.R.L. Wright and J.W. Wright. ...*

Michael Cavanagh married Dorothy Trench in 1897, they had a daughter, Dorothea Maria (1898), and two sons John 'Jack' Francis (1900), and Brendan Michael (1904). From early on, Michael was joined in partnership by his brother James, with a break when James undertook further studies in London, similar to those of his elder mentor. Prodigious development was undertaken in WA during the late 1890s, and in May 1898 the Cavanaghs announced that Herbert Sedgfield had been taken into partnership, with tender notices for works in the Fremantle area soon put out by Cavanagh & Sedgfield, although the union was short-lived. *Wises Directory* of 1898 includes an entry for the Cavanaghs with E.J. Keogh, indicating that during this busy time a number of partnerships had been considered.

George Poole was inaugural president of WAIA and served from 1896 until 1903, even though he spent a period of time overseas in 1897-98. Poole was succeeded by Michael Cavanagh in 1903. Poole 'took the reins' again from Cavanagh in 1905-1907, followed by Percy Harrison who was voted president at the annual meetings of March 1907 and 1908, by Talbot Hobbs in the period 1909-1911, Harrison 1911-1913, Poole 1913-1915, and Cavanagh again in 1915-1917. Along with these three other respected architects, Cavanagh provided stable and impressive leadership of the Institute in the early Twentieth Century.



Delegates to the Conference of Australian Architects, Sydney 1901

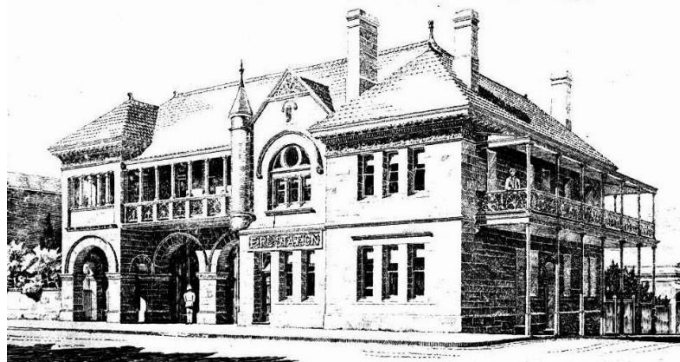
Delegation leaders seated second row, left to right: Michael Cavanagh (W.A.), Thomas Watts (Vic.), John Barlow (N.S.W.), Edward Davies (S.A.), Claude Chambers (Qld), G. Sydney Jones (N.S.W.).

Michael Cavanagh at the Conference of Australian Architects, Sydney 1901 (Freeland, p.67)

Representing WAIA, Michael Cavanagh travelled with fellow Perth architect Harry Trigg and Kalgoorlie's Hedley Sprigg to NSW for the Conference of Australian Architects, meeting in Sydney in December 1900 - January 1901, where he acted as a vice-chairman. Amongst other resolutions, the conference proposed the formation of a national institute, and Cavanagh duly took the concepts back to his colleagues in WA. In September 1901, a large meeting of Western Australian architects was held in Trigg's Chambers at Barrack Street, Perth. The principal objects of the meeting were (1) to consider the incorporation of WAIA; (2) to arrange for affiliation with the Federal Institute of Australasian Architects; (3) to consider resolutions in connection with the carrying out of public buildings, passed by the recent conference held in Sydney; and (4) to arrange for the election and enrolment of all practising architects throughout Western Australia.

With respect to the first issue, WAIA was duly incorporated in 1902. Less successfully, with rivalry between Victoria and NSW the proposal for a federal institute collapsed, not to be resolved for almost three decades. Although largely ineffectual, the architects' protests were particularly vehement in respect to the contemporary competition for WA's Parliament House; but on the final issue, Cavanagh's and others ongoing efforts toward the registration of architects in WA were finally rewarded with legislation passed in 1921.

Cavanagh was extremely successful in obtaining a majority of Catholic Church and affiliated orders' work in WA in the period 1895-1915. Other architects who did work for the Catholic Church included Edgar Jerome Henderson (1861-1928) and Richard Joseph Dennehy (1854-1939), but it was the Cavanaghs who took the 'lion's share' of major Catholic projects of the period. Whilst based at Perth, the Cavanaghs were still completing projects in South Australia, designing the Bishop of Port Augusta's residence that was opened in 1913 (now St Cecilia at Peterborough).



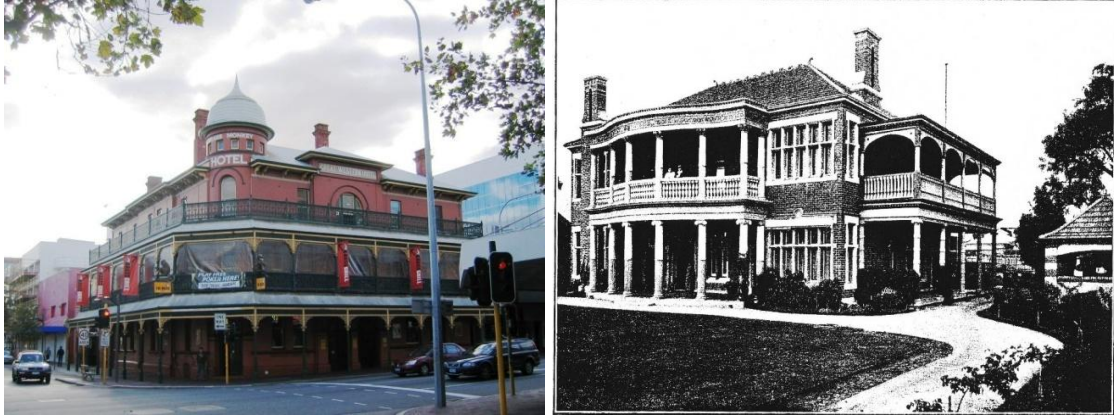
Central Fire Station at Murray Street Perth (*Western Mail*, 29 December 1900, p.30)

Herbert Parry (1882-1951) joined the Cavanaghs in partnership through 1908-1911, and in 1915, previous pupil C. Gordon Clifton (1884-1967) was taken in to broaden the practice's scope. After the *Architects Act of Western Australia 1921* received formal assent, Cavanagh was amongst the first group to register with the Architects Board in May 1922, receiving registration number 2. Other notable practitioners such as J.F. Allen (1), J.H. Eales (3), J.J.T. Hobbs (4), J.L. Ochiltree (5), G.H. Parry (6), W.G. Pickering (7), G.T. Poole (8), and A.R.L. Wright (9) were listed at the same time.



St Brigid's Convent, John Street, Northbridge (John Taylor, 2000)

Secular works include the Central Fire Station, Murray Street, Perth; Fremantle Fire Station; Great Western (Brass Monkey) Hotel, Perth; the Esplanade Hotel, Perth; Orient Hotel, Fremantle; P & O Hotel, Fremantle; Melville Park (Majestic) Hotel, Applecross; Tambellup Hotel; many important residences including Lexbourne House, West Perth; offices including Mannings Chambers, Fremantle; bank premises and many shops including the extensive Foy & Gibson's department store, Perth (later David Jones).



Great Western Hotel, William Street, Perth (John Taylor, 2008); Lexbourne House, Colin Street, West Perth (*The Salon*, July 1915, p.210)

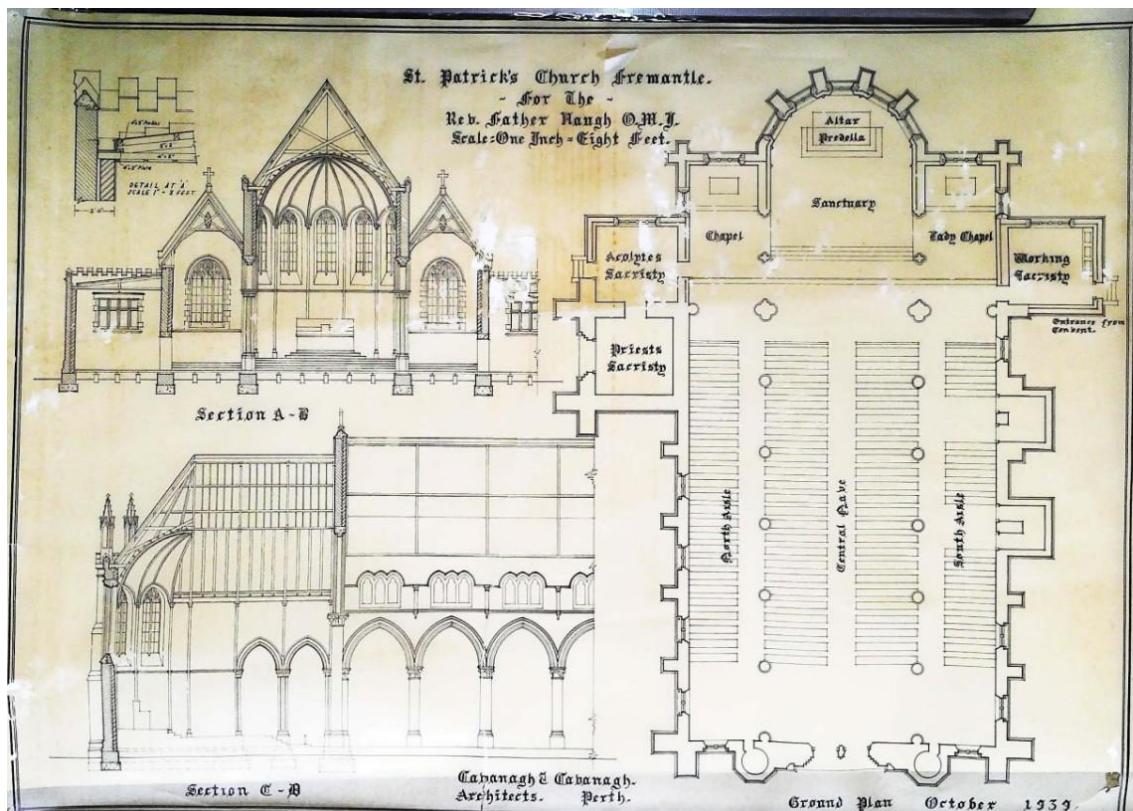
Cavanagh's son Brendan (1904-1994) was registered as a twenty-one-year-old in 1925 (107), having served four years articles with his father from December 1920, and became a valued member of the practice. The practice again advertised as Cavanagh & Cavanagh - James Cavanagh had moved to work in Queensland around 1918. Brendan married Edith May Sforcina in 1926, and the couple had two sons, one of whom (Michael Gerard Cavanagh 1928-2008) may have gone on to become an architect in NSW - after the parents divorced in 1937 and Edith had moved to Sydney. Brendan had his own practice for a period in the late 1920s to early 1930s, and was listed at Kojonup 1940-1941 – perhaps to be near his brother Jack as the Second World War commenced.

As Michael Cavanagh's business picked up again in the mid-1930s, the practice again took on partners, advertised as Cavanagh, Cavanagh & Tracey (William Harold Arthur Tracey) in *Wises Directory* of 1935, with Cavanagh, Cavanagh & Allom listed 1937-1939. New Zealand-born Henry Ogilvie Allom (1897-1981) had served in the First World War, was articled to Cavanagh from 1921 for four years, and left a position with the Workers Homes Board to re-enter private practice.



Residence at 57 Ord Street West Perth designed by Cavanagh & Cavanagh for Michael Durack (*The West Australian*, 12 March 1932, p.11); and the house's 'Lissadell' stone arch frontage relocated to 163 Stirling Highway Nedlands (John Taylor, 2020)

Michael Cavanagh died on 29 May 1941 at Subiaco, and was buried at Karrakatta Cemetery. His last pupil, W.A. (Bill) Durack, wrote in June 1941: 'By some, perhaps, he was not greatly loved, his quick criticism and Irish temperament being occasionally taken to heart by some of his associates. But on the whole, he was regarded by all who knew him as being one of the soundest and ablest men in his calling and I will always remember him as the man who was tireless in his efforts to stamp out those abuses and unprofessional acts which had been allowed to creep into the profession.'



St Patrick's Church Fremantle - plan and sections (W.A. Durack archives, Patrick Durack)

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- 'People', *Truth*, 5 May 1929, p.10 (Brendan and Edith return from New Zealand to *Aherlow* at 243 Walcott Street Mount Lawley).
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Heritage Committee review: 14 April 2011 Last updated: 11 June 2026

Citation details:

Taylor, Dr John J., 'Michael Francis Cavanagh (1860-1941)', Western Australian Architect Biographies, <http://www.taylorarchitects.com.au/Biographies.html> accessed DATE.