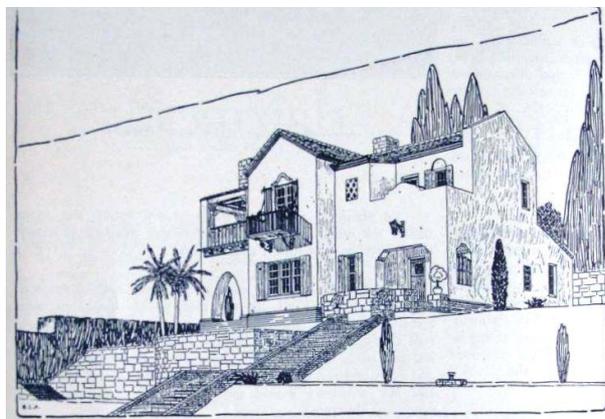




**Nancy Allen**

(*Daily News*, 27 December 1932, p.7)

**Nancy Lorne Allen** (1908-1993) was born at Glen Innes, NSW in December 1908 to George Norman and Ethel Maud Allen. Her brothers John Selwyn (Selwyn) Allen and George Frederick Douglas (Douglas) Allen were born at Glen Innes in September 1906 and April 1913 respectively. After her family moved to Western Australia in 1917, Nancy attended Nedlands Primary and Perth Modern School. Perhaps inspired by the early 1920s example of Margaret Pitt Morison entering the previously male-dominated architectural profession, in June 1927 Nancy became an articled pupil of Perth architects Herbert Eales (1864-1957) and Eustace Cohen (1881-1938). Following completion of her articles, Nancy was fortunate to remain with the firm during Depression years, as there was often little for her to do. By 1930, Allen was sitting examinations set by the Architects Board of Western Australia, with a view to registration, which she achieved late in 1932.



Nancy Allen's sketch of a house by Eales Cohen & Bennett, proposed to be erected on Mounts Bay Road beneath Mt Eliza; accompanying W.G. Bennett's article *My Idea of Spanish Architecture* (*Western Homes*, FW Nunn, Perth, November 1929, vol 1 no 2, pp.9-10).

Nancy Allen was just the second female architect registered in WA (Dec 1932, no.138); concurrent with the registration of Dorothea Hancock (Dec 1932, no.139), and only following Morison (Oct 1924, no.102 & Aug 1929, no.129). Despite a promising increase in the number of women entering the profession in WA in the 1930s, with the disruption of the Second World War hindering the potential studies of both men and women, just six females were registered as architects in Western Australia in the first half of the Twentieth Century.

By 1930 the pugnacious W.G. (Bill) Bennett (1896-1977) had been made a partner in the firm Eales, Cohen & Bennett. Bennett had originally been in charge of the drawing office at the firm, and although Nancy had enjoyed the tutelage of the older partners Eales and Cohen, she had more common interests in architecture with Bennett. Bill Bennett left the partnership and set up his own practice in Perth at the end of June 1935. Nancy Allen joined Bennett in July 1936, and with Eliot Thomson Dickens (registered August 1934, no.147) formed the initial staff of the practice.



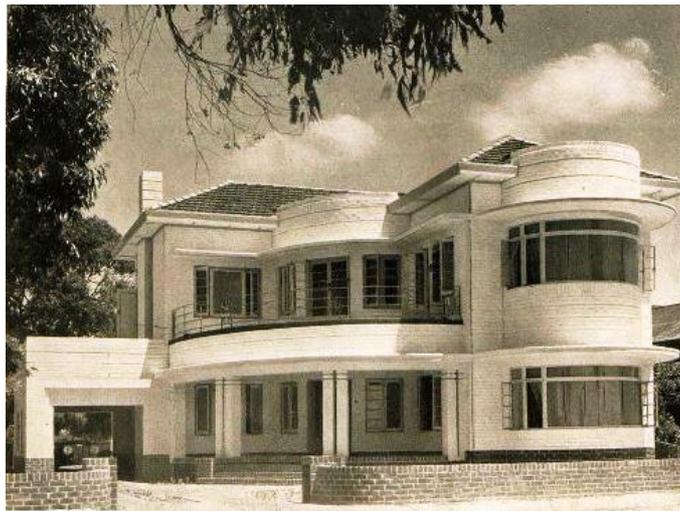
*HOSTESSES AND DISTINGUISHED guest at the last entertainment given in Perth to Miss Sheila MacDonald, Mr. Ramsay MacDonald's daughter. From left to right the group, who took tea at the June Elizabeth yesterday afternoon, includes: Miss Nell Newham (standing), Miss Margaret Battye, Miss M. Vile, Miss Nancy Allen, Miss Gwenyth Tebbutt, Dr. Gladys Hallows, Miss Sheila MacDonald, Miss Zoe Bennett, Dr. Francesca Schlink, Miss Kathleen Hartrey, and Miss Jessie Johnson were also present.*

Nancy Allen at a function to mark the visit of Sheila MacDonald, daughter of the British Prime Minister (*Daily News*, 9 October 1934, p.9)

The few female architects in Perth during the 1930s held a very strong bond within the overwhelmingly male-dominated profession of the time, and in July 1936 Allen joined Zoie Bennett and Margaret Pitt Morison at a luncheon to welcome visiting Melbourne architect Ellison Harvie, hospital design specialist and a leader in her field. By this time Dorothea Hancock had moved to England. Women working in Perth had both informal and formal gatherings, where architects, doctors, lawyers and others in professional circles met to

discuss their own interests and concerns. Newspaper reports note the close association of Allen with former school friends such as lawyer Margaret Batty and others, all establishing a greater women's presence in the City.

Bennett's practice, anchored by the detailed work of Nancy Allen, is best known for their many hallmark 'moderne' buildings produced in the late 1930s, including the Plaza Theatre and Arcade, Perth (1937), Raffles Hotel, Applecross (1937), Lord Forrest Olympic Pool, Kalgoorlie (1938) and Beverley Town Hall and Picture Gardens (1938). With Nancy's major involvement in domestic projects, the practice also completed a number of substantial houses in the 'moderne' style. In 1937-38 they completed the Dyer Residence at 27 The Esplanade, South Perth, and 'Finchley' at 58A Leake Street, Peppermint Grove. Mrs Dyer maintained that Bennett was the architect but that Allen "did most of the work, supervising and drafting".



Dyer Residence at 27 The Esplanade, South Perth (*Turners*, Mar 1938, p.12).

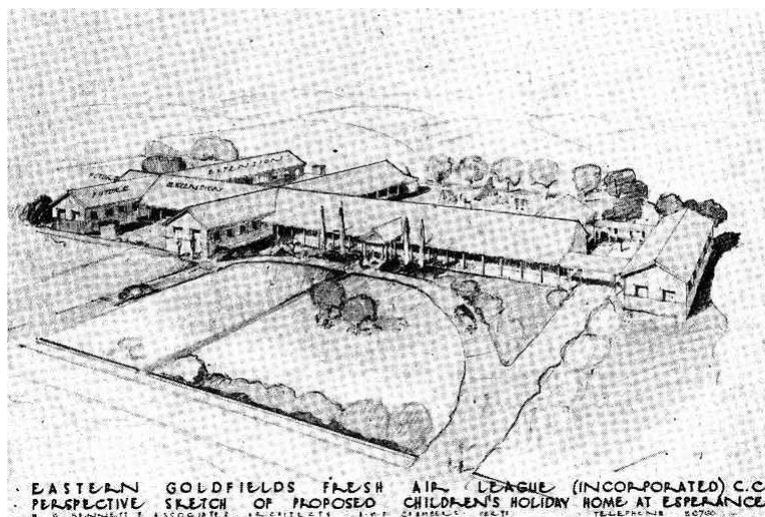
Following the commencement of the Second World War, with Bennett having departed for service in the Australian forces, Nancy continued the work of the practice for a time. Nancy also served with the Allied Works Council, working with other women architects including Margaret Morison and Zoie Bennett-Fryer in the architectural section of the WA Works and Services Branch. In late 1944 Nancy gave a talk to the Labour Women's Conference in Perth, the essence of which was summarised in *The Western Mail*, under an article titled 'Living Space ... the Essentials of Housing'. Representing the WA branch of the Modern Architects Research Society, Allen advocated to delegates the

advantages of grouped dwellings as an aid to solving various social problems, and the necessity of improved services to raise living standards. Reading the article in the twenty-first century, what is most interesting is Allen's perceptive understanding and elucidation of a very broad scope of planning issues; from the details of kitchen planning in housing design right through to broader town-planning issues.

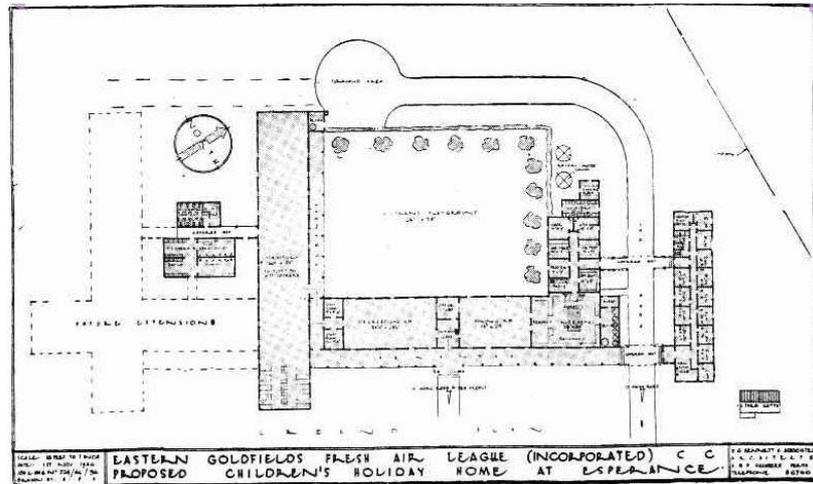


Manjimup Infant Health Centre, opened in July 1946 (*The West Australian*, 9 July 1946, p.3)

It is clear Nancy was still undertaking a small amount of honorary work under the name of W.G. Bennett Architect during latter war years. She drew plans in November 1944 for a proposed Infant Health Centre at Manjimup. Nancy returned to full-time practise with Bill Bennett after the war and became an associate with her brother Douglas Allen.



Perspective sketch of a Nancy Allen scheme for a children's holiday home at Esperance, including the utilization of buildings purchased from the former RAAF Boulder site (*Kalgoorlie Miner*, 27 February 1947, p2).



Site plan of a Nancy Allen scheme for a children's holiday home at Esperance (*Kalgoorlie Miner*, 27 February 1947, p2).

Nancy's senior role is evident in her travel to Kalgoorlie during February 1947 to work on a scheme for a children's holiday home at Esperance, including the utilization of buildings purchased from the RAAF base at Boulder. Nancy and Douglas Allen (who achieved registration as an architect in May 1948) joined Bill Bennett as full partners in the business during August 1949, when Bennett formed a short-lived alliance with Robert Blatchford and James W. Johnson as Bennett, Blatchford, Allen & Johnson. The firm was then designated W.G. Bennett, Allen & Allen.

After she became a partner in the firm Nancy spent more time in the administration of the office, was responsible for most of the residential projects and was the one with 'all the contacts'. While the practice continued to accept residential commissions in the 1950s and onwards, it became predominantly involved in commercial and institutional work, including work for various municipal councils and undertaking many infant welfare clinic projects. Allen was also project architect for the Ascot and Belmont racecourse grandstands.

Designs specifically credited to Nancy include the heritage-listed Manjimup Infant Health Centre completed in 1946 and Paxwold House, Lesmurdie at the State campsite and training centre for the Girl Guides. No doubt there are many more fine examples of her work that could be identified with further research, forming the core of a detailed study at post-graduate level.

George and Ethel Allen had purchased a property at 2 Portland Street, Nedlands in the late 1920s, and they both passed away at Nedlands, Ethel in

1948 and George in 1954. After Douglas Allen died in 1976, with Bill Bennett following in 1977, Nancy Allen FRAIA continued the work of the practice up until her retirement in 1981, after having been one of Perth's most prominent and successful female architects through some 55 years of dedicated effort. Nancy's older brother Selwyn died at Trigg in 1985, and she lived at Portland Street until her death on 18 October 1993, aged 84 years.

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- 'Miss Nancy Allen', *The West Australian*, 11 July 1936, p.20 (joins W.G. Bennett).
- 'The Social Round', *Daily News*, 22 July 1936, p.8 (Ellison Harvey visit).
- 'Mr C.S. Dyer Residence in South Perth', *Turner's*, vol.2, no.3, March 1938, pp.12-13.
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- 'Perth Home Planned on Modern Lines', *Decoration and Glass*, Nov 1938, pp.26-29.
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- 'Living Space ... the Essentials of Housing', *Western Mail*, 5 October 1944, p.30 (talk by Allen).
- 'Manjimup Clinic', *The West Australian*, 9 July 1946, p.3 (opened by Minister).
- 'Esperance Building Fund Appeal', *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 27 February 1947, p.2 (holiday home).
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