



Ron Ledger c.1940s (courtesy Chris Ledger)

**Ronald Albert Thomas Ledger** (1904-1998) was born at Perth on 29 February 1904 to Edson and Annie Frances (nee Sumner) Ledger. Ronald's parents had married at Fremantle in February 1895. With his brother Joseph, Edson ran the industrial engineering company J & E Ledger. 'Ron' had siblings Edson Clifford (Ed) b.1896, Queenie Clara b.1897, Joseph Francis (Frank) b.1899, Ethel Mary b.1901 (d.1902), Annie Vera (Jing) b.1905, Violet May b.1907, George Edward (Ted) b.1910, and Harold Haig b.1917. When Ron was born, the family lived at 403 Lord Street in Perth. He attended Norwood (now Mount Lawley) State School and then Perth Technical College (PTC) from 1917-1919, by which time the family had moved to 38 Joel Terrace in Norwood. During 1919, Ron commenced his architectural career in the St George's Terrace Perth offices of Hobbs Smith & Forbes as an unarticled junior draftsman and record clerk. With principals J.J. Talbot Hobbs (1864-1938) and W.J. Waldie Forbes (1869-1939), other staff in the early 1920s included architects Gordon Royle (1886-1970), Alex Winning (1892-1963), and building supervisor Tom Edwards – a friend of Edson Ledger, and responsible for Ron's gaining the position.



Ledger family at rear of 38 Joel Terrace in 1921 - back row Jing, Ron, Queenie, Frank, Vi;  
front row Ted, Edson, Annie, Harold, Ed. (Chris Ledger)

In 1925, Ron joined the State Government's Workers' Homes Board (WHB) as a draftsman, and met Dorothy 'Jean' Duncan (1907-1994), also employed as an assistant to WHB architect W.G. Conochie (1897-1948). In addition to Ron's domestic design work at the WHB, in 1928 he prepared designs and drawings for two family residences, one at 39 Archdeacon Street Nedlands for his sister Queenie and her husband Maurie Ballard, another for his oldest brother Ed and his wife Ada Ledger at 46 Tyrell Street, also in Nedlands. Both are extant, with modernised kitchens and bathrooms etc. He also prepared the drawings for a residence at 8 Brockman Avenue Dalkeith, for brother Ted and wife Jean Ledger.

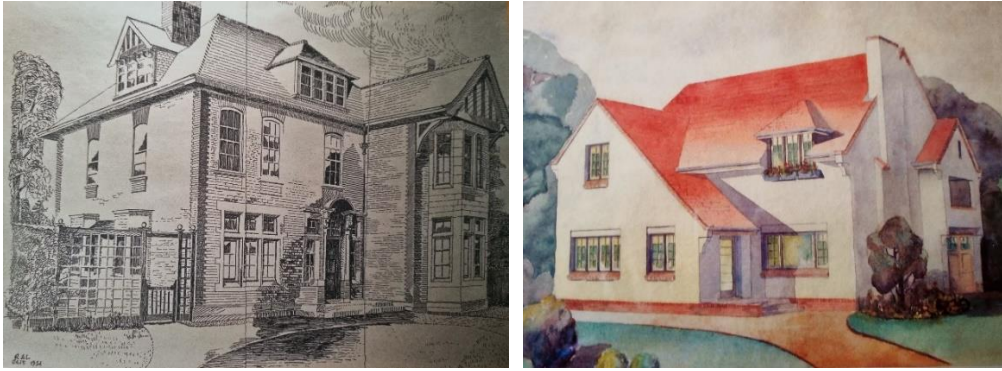


A WHB war service home design prepared by Ron Ledger – the sketch example at left may be of the type shown at right - 425 Railway Road in Shenton Park. (Chris Ledger)



Residence at 39 Archdeacon Street Nedlands for Queenie and Maurie Ballard. (Chris Ledger)

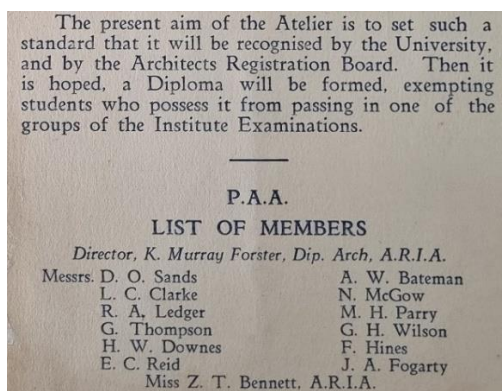
In 1929, Ron Ledger and Jean Duncan attended a series of 10 lectures on the History of Architecture at the University of Western Australia (UWA) in Irwin Street Perth, provided by architectural profession stalwart A.R.L. Wright (1861-1939). They both then passed an examination held at the conclusion of the course. Retrenched in late 1929, for a short period Ron gained employment in the office of architect F.G.B. Hawkins (1885-1956). Hawkins had moved from Melbourne in 1928 to work on the Victoria Insurance Company Building at 98-102 St George's Terrace, Perth. With the deepening of the Great Depression, Ron finished work with Hawkins in 1930, hence designing and building a timber-framed beach house for his father at Scarborough.



Sketches by Ron Ledger, 1924 and circa 1930s. (Chris Ledger)

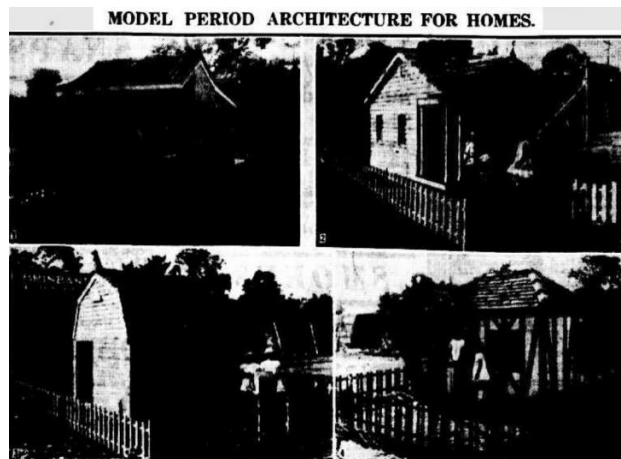
Ron re-joined the WHB - Public Works Department (PWD) under Principal Architect A.E. 'Paddy' Clare (1894-1975) in 1931, made possible by Jean Duncan's resignation! Perhaps following the tenuous financial security afforded by a government position in Depression years, Ron Ledger and Jean were married on Christmas Eve in 1932, and built a house at 13 Harvey Road Shenton Park in 1933, where they lived for over 45 years. In 1933 they were blessed with the birth of daughter Jennifer Anne, and in 1936 a son Christopher James.

Not having undertaken articulated training, Ron pursued further studies toward becoming a registered architect – most likely the International Correspondence School course, also completed by PWD juniors such as Gordon Finn (1908-1998). Ron was a member of the inaugural Perth Architectural Atelier (PAA), established at PTC in 1934 under the directorship of Murray Forster (1907-1967). The PAA was relocated to UWA in 1936, and renamed the School of Architectural Design. The studio class experienced difficulties with support, and was discontinued in the early stages of the Second World War (1939-1945), with a formal architectural course not finally established at PTC until 1946.



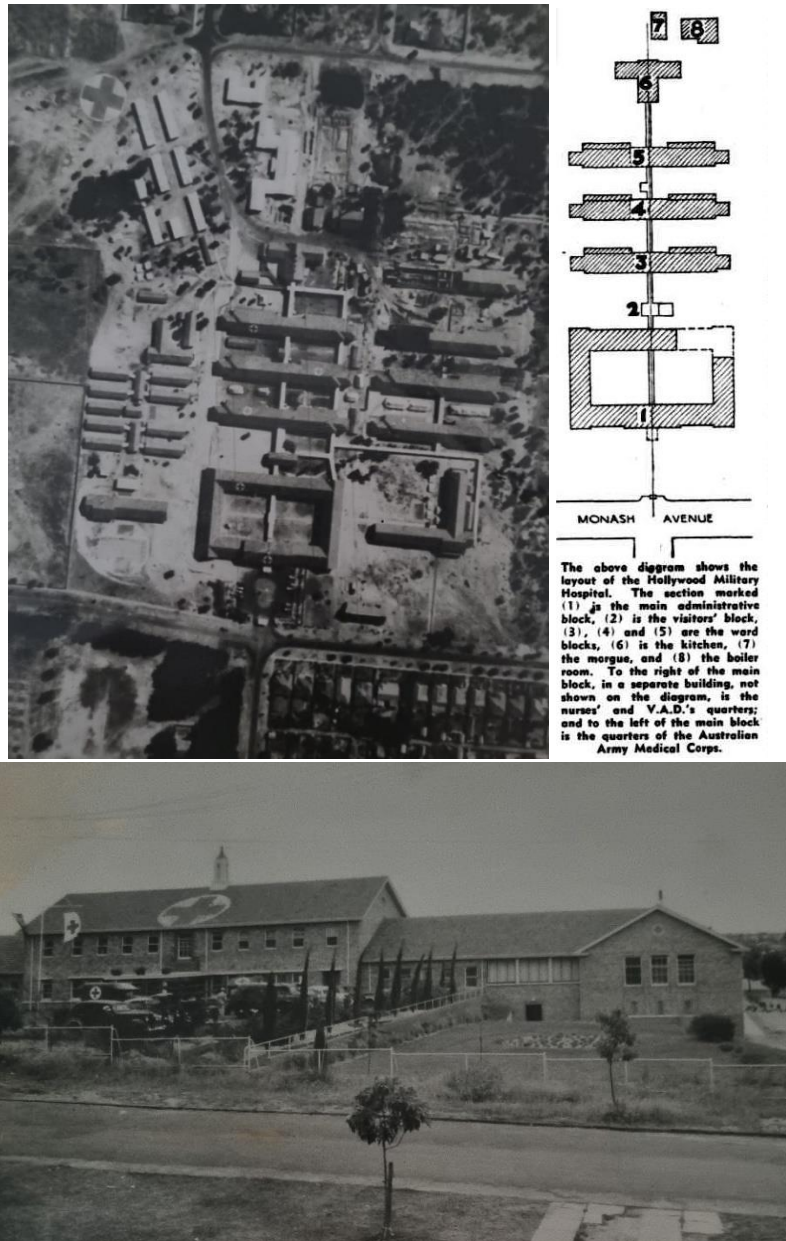
Portion of brochure for the Perth Architectural Atelier 'Premier Exhibition' shown at Harris, Scarfe & Sandovers in Perth, opened by Sir J. Talbot Hobbs in December 1934. (Chris Ledger)

Thirty year old Ron was a winner in a small homes competition sponsored by the Royal Institute of Architects of Western Australia (RIAWA) and Bristile, announced in January 1935. *The West Australian* newspaper reported in March 1935: *Promoted by H.L. Brisbane and Co., a competition was held recently among student architects for the best designs in period architecture for homes. Many students entered the competition which was run under the aegis of the Institute of Architects, the judges being the president and secretary of the Institute (Messrs. Waldie Forbes and R. Summerhayes) and Mr. H. L. Brisbane. ....*



Model homes built from prize-winning designs in a competition and erected at 'Bristile Park on Stirling Highway, Claremont' [now Rose Gardens, Nedlands]. The styles of houses and the designers: (1) Spanish, Norman McGow; (2) Georgian, Harry Downes; (3) Colonial, Ron Ledger; (4) Tudor, Fred Hines. ('Period Architecture', *The West Australian*, 9 March 1935, p.4).

Leaving the PWD in January 1935 with a glowing reference from Paddy Clare, Ron joined the Commonwealth Government Works and Services Branch of the Department of the Interior (later known as Department of Works) as a 'temporary architect' (although he was not registered at this time). Working under chief architect C.R. Ross (1874-1949), Ron was engaged on a variety of projects including post offices, customs quarters, and Commonwealth Banks. From 1937 he was the senior architect for Defence works including barracks, workshops, armament depots and Army camps. From 1940 Ron had a major involvement with the design and development of the Military Hospital (110 AGH) at Hollywood, modelled on the plans developed for Heidelberg Military Hospital in Victoria. He moved to the Department of Works head office at Melbourne preparing designs from September to December 1940, along with Frank Glennon (c.1899-1964), who had been managing architect for the Hackett Memorial Buildings at the UWA Crawley campus under Rodney Alsop (1881-1932).



Aerial photo, layout diagram, and photo of Hollywood Hospital from Monash Avenue. (photos Chris Ledger; diagram in 'Hollywood Hospital', *The West Australian*, 11 November 1941, p.4).

During the Second World War Ron was a member of the Volunteer Defence Corps (Home Guard, or 'Dads Army'). At enlistment in Claremont during March 1942, thirty-eight year old Ron was recorded as working at the Department of the Interior on the 6<sup>th</sup> floor of the GPO at Perth. Private work that Ron undertook for the family business (under the control of his brother, later Sir Frank Ledger) included alterations to the commercial premises of J & E Ledger at Pier Street in Perth during 1944-1946, developing offices in an old cottage, adding a second floor and façade. He also designed a new building at the corner of Wellington Street and Lord Streets in East Perth.



J & E Ledger premises, at left in Pier Street Perth, and at right on the corner of Wellington Street and Lord Streets in East Perth. (Chris Ledger)

Not blessed with the conventional pathways to architectural professional development such as an articulated apprenticeship or a cadetship, but encouraged by support and recommendation from colleagues, Ron achieved registration with the Architects Board of Western Australia by special examination on 14 August 1946 (no. 180). He was formally appointed as a Senior Architect with the Department of Works in 1946, and provided relief as Principal Architect when necessary until he was promoted to the position in 1950.



Commonwealth Department of Works staff pictured on the roof of their offices at the GPO at Forrest Place in Perth circa 1939. Ron Ledger is second from left in the front row, at the centre of the front row is George Sydney Cook (Works Director until the end of 1939), to his left is chief architect 'Clary' Ross, and at right on the front row is W.H. (Bill) Robertson – founder of the PTC architectural course in 1946. The other architects and staff are identified on p.42 of 'Fifty Years of Construction'. (Chris Ledger)

Ron continued as Principal Architect until March 1958, when he moved to Papua & New Guinea on temporary transfer as Assistant Director for that region. In April 1961 he returned to Perth, and temporarily acted as Director of Works at Perth until February 1962, eventually rising to that position in September 1963. He was the first and only West Australian to hold the post, remaining in office until his retirement in April 1965. Major projects undertaken by Ron included Perth Airport, the Tax Office in St Georges Terrace Perth, and in the WA Region during his term as Director included the 'Irwin' Telephone Exchange, ABC Transmitter building at Bunbury, Barrack Block at HMAS Leeuwin, and commencement of the CSIRO Laboratory.

With his early training at Hobbs Smith & Forbes, then WHB, Ron was confident in both domestic and larger scale works, and this was reflected in his wide-ranging career. The designing and management of many varied and large projects for the Commonwealth was interspersed with domestic projects for family. Ron designed a residence for daughter Jen and her husband Mike Cook at Wembley Downs in 1961, and a house for his nephew Ross and his wife Fran Ledger at 4 Takari Crescent City Beach in the 1960s.



Ross and Fran Ledger residence at 4 Takari Crescent City Beach, built in the 1960s. (Google)

Not one to ignore his architectural skills in retirement, from 1969 Ron worked with builder Ted Baxter, undertaking many projects for their contacts over a ten year period. Further paid work in 'retirement' included the design of entrance gates, an office and showroom, horse stables, and alterations to provide living quarters at the Jane Brook Stud Farm in 1975.



Horse stables at Jane Brook Stud Farm. (Chris Ledger)

Ron also undertook significant honorary and voluntary service for community organisations, including the Seaview Golf Club in Cottesloe for which in 1969-1970 he was the coordinating architect for a new club house designed by Geoff Summerhayes (1928-2010). As honorary architect, Ron designed extensions to the Hollywood Bowling Club in Smythe Road Nedlands during 1970-1980.

During his career, Ron Ledger became an Associate of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects (RAIA) in 1946, and was recognised as a Fellow in 1963. Ron followed a slightly unusual and difficult pathway to registration as an architect, perhaps due to family circumstances. His glowing references from highly credentialed architects at Hobbs Smith & Forbes, from F.G.B. Hawkins, Paddy Clare, Murray Forster, 'Clary' Ross and many Commonwealth Government colleagues testified to his professional skill and character.



Ron and Jean Ledger at London in 1965. (Chris Ledger)

Ron was awarded life membership of Seaview Golf Club for his honorary work from 1948, and recognised in the remembrance hall of Hollywood Hospital. Jean Ledger died at Nedlands 5 September 1994, and Ron Ledger died at Nedlands 9 September 1998, with both memorialised at Karrakatta Cemetery.



References:

- 'Weddings', *Daily News*, 28 February 1895, p.2 (Edson Ledger and Annie Francis Sumner).
- 'Funeral Notice', *The West Australian*, 26 September 1902, p.4 (death of sister Ethel Mary).
- 'History of Architecture', *Daily News*, 8 June 1929, p.6 (at UWA Irwin Street by ARL Wright).
- 'Period Architecture', *The West Australian*, 9 March 1935, p.4 (RIAWA Bristile competition).
- 'Fifty Years of Construction', Commonwealth of Australia Department of Housing and Construction, West Australian Region, June 1981, p.25, pp.28-31, accessed online 26 April 2023 [https://www.engineersaustralia.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2017-01/Fifty%20Years%20of%20Construction1.compressed\\_0.pdf](https://www.engineersaustralia.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2017-01/Fifty%20Years%20of%20Construction1.compressed_0.pdf)
- 'R.A. Ledger – Memories as at December 1995', and 'R.A. Ledger Scrap Book', documents held by Chris Ledger, accessed in May 2023..
- 'Directory of Architects and Buildings in WA 1945-96', questionnaire completed by Ron Ledger for Simon Anderson at UWA in 1996.
- 'Windmill & Wishing Well' (Bristile product display in Great Eastern Highway Belmont), Register of Heritage Places Assessment Doc, 2000

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