

Ronald Oldham in 1885 & c.1930
(Ian Oldham)

Ronald Gregory Oldham (1867-1937) was born 11 December 1867 at Doveton Crescent, Ballarat, Victoria. He was the second son of teacher-artist James and Rebecca Oldham, who eventually had twelve children. Ronald's older brother, Charles Lancelot Oldham (1865-1920) also became an architect, and had studied at Ballarat College – it is possible his younger brother followed the same path. With depression in Victoria, Ronald came to Western Australia as a builder but also seeking gold, initially in the Pilbara Region, and then at Coolgardie. He sailed on the SS *Saladin* from Fremantle for Cossack at the end of May 1892, the government having accepted his tender of £1,863 for the construction of the Roebourne School and Quarters.

Having completed construction at Roebourne, and not finding success with prospecting in the north, in February 1893 Ronald walked with his cousin Frank Oldham and two others from Fremantle to Coolgardie. Despite meeting miners who proved to be successful, including Arthur Bayley, Paddy Hannan and Tom Cue - whom Oldham had known in Ballarat, Ronald failed in his gold search endeavours and returned to Perth. During April 1894 Ronald was married at St John's Anglican Church in Fremantle to Jessie Arrol Rodger. Their children were Jean Arrol (1895-1936), Ronald Valentine Arrol (1897-1969), and James Maxwell Arrol (1903-1957). At the birth of Jean in 1895 Ronald was noted as being with the Government's Permanent Way Department.

Wises Directory of 1895 lists Oldham at Elizabeth (now Corkhill) Street, North Fremantle and working at the government railway workshops in North

Fremantle. During 1897-1898 Ronald is listed at John Street, North Fremantle, and in 1899 he is noted as an Inspector of Public Works, resident at *Heatherbrae* in Elizabeth Street. House locations in *Wises Directory* and the slight changing of street addresses suggest that he may have built his first family house in WA on what is now the north-west corner of John and Corkhill Streets, North Fremantle. Oldham speculated with land in North Fremantle, in August 1901 selling 20 building sites on the 'Ballarat Estate', located 'one hundred yards from the new Town-hall site'. From 1901 Oldham and his family had moved a short distance to a new residence named *Cloverly* on the south side of Harvest Road, North Fremantle. He took an active part in local government at this time, was sworn in as Mayor of North Fremantle in December 1903, and lived in the area until 1906. In late 1906 a deputation of North Fremantle councillors and ratepayers presented Oldham with a petition signed by over 200 ratepayers requesting him to renominate for Mayor. By then resident at Swanbourne, he declined.

Charles Oldham had followed his younger brother to WA and commenced practice in Fremantle in 1897, becoming a high profile architect with significant buildings constructed at Fremantle and Perth. Charles' success may have encouraged Ronald to leave the security of government service and enter into private architectural practice, also at Fremantle. Newspapers list Ronald Oldham calling tenders 1902-1903 from Occident Chambers at 119 High Street, Fremantle. He is first listed under 'architects' in the *Wises Directory* of 1904 at High Street, although he moved to Dalgety's Buildings at 1 Cliff Street, Fremantle in June and was listed there 1905-1907. In 1907 he designed new offices for *The West Australian* next to the post office at 27 Market Street, Fremantle and took office space there from 1908-1936. During the period 1924-1926, civil engineer Ronald junior joined with his father in the dual professional partnership Ronald G. Oldham and Son, Architect and Consulting Engineer, and they also ran an office at Warwick House in Perth.

By 1907 Ron Oldham had built a new residence for his family at 5 Saladin Street, Swanbourne. In March 1909 Oldham took his family for a year-long holiday to England, although to maintain his business he returned to WA after around five months. He was to reside in the western Claremont area for the

rest of his life, designing a good number of Federation-style residences that grace the elevated areas of the area formerly known as 'Osborne' – notably in Parry Street, Congdon Street and Hillside Avenue. One of these sprawling bungalows was built for his own family, and in 1913 they moved to a new *Cloverly* at 3 Windsor Street, Claremont - just near the railway station at Swanbourne, the proximity of which would have assisted to convey him to and from the office at Fremantle and to his projects around the metropolitan area.

Following the promulgation of the *Architects Act* in WA during 1922, Ronald Oldham's qualifications and experience were considered acceptable to the Architects Board of WA, and he was registered with the Board (no.25) on 10 July 1922. Tender notices record many residences, shops and other buildings for which Ronald Oldham was the architect, in Fremantle, Cottesloe, Claremont, Peppermint Grove and suburbs around Perth from 1902-1936. Many buildings designed by Ronald have yet to be attributed to him due to a lack of research, and would be too numerous to list in this summary article. Prominent examples that have been identified include the residence *Woodbine* at 11 Johnston Street, Peppermint Grove of 1904; *Cheriton* homestead of 1904 for G.J. Gooch at Gingin; a large portion of the Burford soap factory at North Fremantle in 1910; and the H.V. McKay Pty Ltd premises on the north-east corner of Murray and King Streets, Perth of 1924.

At sixty years of age Ron was involved in a serious accident when he was run over by a motor car during August 1928, but he recovered sufficiently to continue in practice until 1936. Oldham died 10 April 1937 at his residence *Cloverly* in Windsor Street. He was buried in the Presbyterian section at Karrakatta Cemetery. Jessie died in 1941. Their daughter Jean Hatchett had twins born at *Cloverly* in 1928, but she died at *Swansea* 15 Saladin Street, Swanbourne in September 1936.

Ron Oldham was one of many architects from eastern Australia who proceeded to WA in search of work in the 1890s, had families, founded businesses and remained on the western seaboard. His projects often being of a smaller scale, Ron's design portfolio is less recognized than that of his brother Charles, and our heritage registers would benefit from a detailed tertiary-level study of his prolific work.

References:

- 'Births', *Ballarat Star*, 13 December 1867, p.2 (date and location of birth).
- 'Works Department', *The West Australian*, 12 May 1892, p.4 (tender for Roebourne School).
- 'Shipping Notes', *The West Australian*, 1 June 1892, p.4 (sails for Cossack).
- 'Government Gazette', *The West Australian*, 2 July 1892, p.6 (tender accepted for Roebourne School and Quarters).
- 'Marriage', *The West Australian*, 4 May 1894, p.4 (marriage to Jessie Rodger at Fremantle).
- 'Births', *The West Australian*, 25 January 1895, p.4 (birth Jean *Glenroan* Brucetown, Nth Frem).
- 'Births', *The West Australian*, 13 December 1897, p.4 (birth of Ronald Jnr at North Fremantle).
- 'Late Advertisements', *Daily News*, 30 August 1901, p.3 (selling North Fremantle land).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 22 August 1902, p.1 (carriage factory Henry Street Fremantle for Bolton & Sons).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 27 September 1902, p.5 (two residences Peppermint Grove for Charles C. Newton; Nth Fremantle for J.J. Thomas, Peter Duggan, Mrs A.M. Scott; Plympton for Mrs D. Ashwood).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 9 March 1903, p.1 (residence Thompson Rd Claremont for Thomas Carter, cottages Jane St South Fremantle for Mrs H. Hearley).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 20 March 1903, p.3 (villa Lilly Street Fremantle for P.B. Bailey).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 25 April 1903, p.3 (pair stone & brick villas, Thompson Road, North Fremantle, for Wm. Robinson).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 11 September 1903, p.2 (3 x two storey shops & residences, Victoria Avenue, North Fremantle for Dr Kenny). [Possibly 257-61 Queen Victoria Street].
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 15 September 1903, p.2 (two brick shops Napoleon Street Cottesloe for A.H. Cadoux).
- 'Births', *The West Australian*, 2 November 1903, p.1 (birth of James at *Cloverly* Nth Fremantle).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 19 December 1903, p.2 (two storey brick & stone homestead, Gingin, for G.J. Gooch) [*Cheriton* at 183 Cheriton Road, Gingin].
- 'Notice to Contractors', *The West Australian*, 6 June 1904, p.1 (move High St to Dalgety's Bldg).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 6 June 1904, p.1 (St Mary's Anglican Rectory North Fremantle).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 11 June 1904, p.2 (stone & brick residence Johnston Street, Peppermint Grove for C.B. Kenworthy).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 6 February 1906, p.2 (residence cnr Victoria Parade [now Freshwater Parade] & Pensioner Terrace [now Victoria Avenue] Claremont for H.E. Mofflin [Mofflin became Mayor of Claremont; the house was demolished without permit in 2007]).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 30 March 1906, p.7 (stone turret St John's Church Fremantle).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 28 May 1906, p.2 (brick residence Saladin Street Swanbourne).
- 'North Fremantle Mayoralty', *The West Australian*, 20 October 1906, p.11 (petitioners).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 24 December 1906, p.3 (villa Irvine Street Peppermint Grove).
- 'New Fremantle Offices', *Western Mail*, 7 September 1907, p.34 (offices Market St Fremantle for The West Australian newspaper).

'Ballarat Residents', *Daily News*, 20 March 1908, p.8 (death of father Ballarat bowls J.C. Smith).

'Mr Ronald G. Oldham', *The West Australian*, 23 February 1909, p.5 (holiday in England).

'Important Auction Sale', *Daily News*, 2 March 1909, p.6 (auction of furniture etc Saladin Street).

'East Perth v North Fremantle', *The West Australian*, 23 May 1910, p.6 (grandstand at North Fremantle Oval).

'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 18 August 1910, p.5 (large additions to W.H. Burford soap and candle factory, North Fremantle).

'From the Ashes', *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 28 June 1912, p.4 (Railway Hotel Southern Cross).

'Personal', *The West Australian*, 11 February 1921, p.6 (elected AWAIA).

'Tenders', *Sunday Times*, 4 May 1924, p.2 (showroom offices King St for H.V. McKay, res West Perth Mrs E.L. Marie, shop Bicton for F.J. Vickerman, res Oakover St E Frem for B. Miller).

'New Business Premises', *Sunday Times*, 11 May 1924, p.11 (Murray Street elevation of H.V. McKay Pty Ltd premises north-east cnr Murray & King Streets Perth).

'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 16 July 1924, p.11 (Ronald junior joins partnership as civil engineer, second office at Warwick House in Perth).

'Gilberts Limited', *The West Australian*, 3 October 1925, p.8 (car assembly garage cnr Forbes & William Street Perth designed by Ronald Oldham and Son).

'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 16 January 1926, p.17 (brick bakehouse and oven east Railway Street Cottesloe for T. McKenna).

'New Metropolitan Works', *The West Australian*, 4 December 1926, p.8 (factory Crawford Rd Maylands for H.V. McKay).

'Early Discoveries at Coolgardie', *Geraldton Guardian*, 1 September 1927, p.4 (gold prospects).

'Mr Ronald G. Oldham', *Sunday Times*, 12 August 1928, p.11s (run over by motor car).

'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 2 June 1932, p.3 (residence cnr Smyth & Park Rds Nedlands for A.J. McIntyre).

'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 16 October 1936, p.1 (repairs and renovations to jarrah residence and shop 89? Monument Street, Buckland Hill).

'Death of Mr R.G. Oldham ARIA', *Sunday Times*, 11 April 1937, p.7 (death).

'Architect's Death', *The West Australian*, 12 April 1937, p.14 (some background details).

Oldham, Ray, 'The Oldham Family in Australia', *Early Days*, Vol.9, Pt.2, 1984, p.60.

'No. 105-115 Claremont Crescent Swanbourne', Town of Claremont draft Heritage Inventory 2014, p.135 (shops on Claremont Crs owned by Jessie Oldham). [R.G.O.'s probate file in SRO]

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Roebourne School of 1892 (Dept of Environment barcode rp03571)



In late 1903 Ronald Oldham designed three two-storey shops & residences at Victoria Avenue, North Fremantle for Dr Kenny – they are likely to be these shops at 257-61 Queen Victoria Street - although the Kennys did own other shops in the street (Google 2014).



Residence 5 Victoria Avenue Claremont for H.E. Mofflin of 1906. Mofflin became Mayor of Claremont; the house was demolished without permit in 2007. (Yahoo.com)



Stone turret to St John's Anglican Church, Fremantle of 1906 (Google 2014); North Fremantle Grandstand of 1910, Gilbert Fraser Reserve (Google 2014).



R G Oldham's family home *Cloverly* 3 Windsor Street Claremont of 1913 (Ian Oldham)



Photo taken from near the bottom of Windsor Street, Claremont of shops built on Claremont Crescent to the north side of the Perth-Fremantle railway (owned by Jessie Oldham in 1940 and thus possibly R.G. Oldham-designed), with Saladin Street houses visible behind the shops, and the Swanbourne Railway Station at right [called Congdon Street Station 1904-1911 and Osborne Station 1911-1921]. (Ian Oldham)

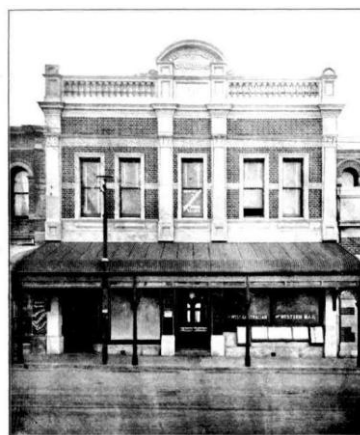


Photo by R. G. Oldham, Fremantle. THE NEW FREMANTLE OFFICES OF THE "WEST AUSTRALIAN" AND "WESTERN MAIL" IN MARKET STREET (See Page 8).

Offices next to the post office at 27 Market Street, Fremantle for *The West Australian* newspaper (*Western Mail*, 7 September 1907, p.34).



The showroom-offices Oldham designed for H.V. McKay Pty Ltd on the north-east corner of Murray & King Streets, Perth in 1924 have been highly modified. Oldham also designed a large factory for the company at Crawford Road, Maylands in 1926. (*The West Australian*, 28 March 1925 p.14, Google 2014).



Mr. W. A. Ross's brick residence, which was recently built in View-street, Peppermint Grove. The architect was Mr. Ronald G. Oldham, of Fremantle, and the contractors were Messrs. D. and R. Drysdale.

Oldham's design of a residence for William Archibald Ross remains today at 10 View Street Peppermint Grove, part of Presbyterian Ladies College (*The West Australia*, 2 April 1932, p.10)



Residence designed in 1932 at 74 Smyth Road Nedlands for Alex J. McIntyre (Google 2014).