## **COWARD, William Gratus**



William Gratus Coward was born in 1857, in the district of Glebe, the son of John W. and Johanna Coward.**1**

In November 1884 he commenced his profession of architect at Scott’s-chamber, 96 Pitt Street, Sydney. Advertisements for work tenders began in May 1885, although some may not have been advertised. There was a paucity of work during the depression years 1890-1893. One of his first works in 1885 was a villa residence, for Mr. H. O. Rotton, at Bowral. It was later described as ‘one of the prettiest villa residences in Bowral.’ The gothic style of architecture was used, and the brick building contained nine rooms. Mr. Rotton would use W. G. Coward to have another residence at Bowral built for his daughter. Some of William Coward’s jobs were large, others small.**2**

On 7th April 1885 he married Annie, second daughter of Richard and Fanny Crossing, of Mudgee, at St. Andrew’s Church, Hunter’s Hill. Annie (Fanny) was born in 1860, at Mudgee.**3**

On 8th March 1886 a son, William B., was born at “Derra,” Victoria-street, Burwood. On 20th November 1887 another son, Harry K., was born at “Beresleigh,” Florence-street, Homebush. On 15th May 1891, another son and final child, Edward G. W., was born at “Beresleigh,” Hannah Street, Beecroft.**4**

In August 1886 he entered into partnership with William Haughton Bell, under the name of Coward and Bell, architects, at Tattersall’s-chambers, Hunter and Castlereagh streets, City. In 1887 the business had moved to Turkish Bath-chambers, Bligh-street, city. On 30th June 1891 the partnership was dissolved, due to effluxion of time. Mr. W. Haughton Bell would carry on his profession elsewhere. Owing to the dissolution of the partnership William Gratus Coward was entrusted the supervisory work on the construction of the Imperial Insurance Company, O’Connell-street, which was completed in early 1892.**5**

Mr. W. Haughton Bell was born at Kew, Victoria, on 19th March, 1863, son of the Francis Bell, engineer. He came to N.S.W. in 1864 and was educated chiefly at Sydney Grammar School, after which he was articled with the firm of Blacket and Sons, architects, where he served five years and then was duly qualified as an architect. He joined the Naval Artillery Volunteer Corps (N.A.V.), becoming a Lieutenant-commander of the starboard watch.**6**

In April 1888 he became an alderman in the Municipal Council of Strathfield. By January 1892 he had resigned as alderman and a public meeting was held to determine a replacement for the vacancy.**7**

In March 1889 he was a provisional director of a public company, S. Cranston and Co., Ltd., Mr. Cranston being a wholesale iron merchant.**8**

In May 1889 there was a vacancy in his office, for an articled pupil. In October 1890 he advertised for a Clerk of Works.**9**

By 1891 he had moved to Beecroft.

At the beginning of 1891 Mr. Coward became the first elected president of the Beecroft Progress Association, and would remain so, up to his early death. On 18th February 1891 a general meeting was held at his residence, Beecroft. That same month St. John’s Church of England was opened for worship, Messrs. Coward and Bell being the architects, and Messrs. Hart and Sons, Parramatta, being the contractors.**10**

In May 1891 he was made a Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects (F.R.I.B.A.).**11**

In February 1892 a public dispute occurred in relation to the building of a railway bridge, whether to being continued from Hannah Street, where Mr. Coward lived, or Copeland-street. As President of the Beecroft Progress Association it was intimated that he was a ‘land-speculator’ and that the Association did not represent Beecroft. In due course two railway bridges were built, from both streets.**12**

In October 1892 William Coward was declared a justice of the peace.**13**

In June 1894 he purchased Crown Land allotments 1A and 1B, section 5, fronting Railway Crescent and Beecroft Parade, 150 yards from Beecroft railway station, to the combined value of £62 10s.**14**

In the morning of 1st November 1894 there occurred a serious railway accident at Redfern railway station. Mr. W. G. Coward, architect, Beecroft, had severe scalds about the arms, face, neck and the inside of his mouth. He was taken to the residence of his friend, Dr. Munro, of 112 Glebe Point-road, Glebe. On the 3rd November he was somewhat better, however pneumonia set in and he subsequently died on 9th November. He was aged 37 years, and the body was sent from the Glebe address on the 10th November to the Church of England, Rookwood.**15**

‘Quite a gloom was cast over this district on Friday, when the news of the death of Mr. W. G. Coward was circulated. The deceased gentleman had been a resident of Beecroft for some years, and one of the hardest workers for its advancement. He was conspicuous in the formation of the Progress Association, which did so much for the progress of the district, and was largely instrumental in bringing to a successful issue agitations for road repairs and the erection of the bridges over the railway line. At times his views met with some opposition; but his opponents always admired him for his outspokenness and aboveboard dealing. His loss will be very greatly felt by this district, which to a man deeply sympathises with the heartbroken widow and children. Mr. Coward was an architect by profession. The funeral took place at the Necropolis on Saturday [10th November]. Among those present besides relatives of the deceased were Mr. J. Parry, outdoor superintendent, representing the Railway Commissioners, Mr. J. Horbury Hunt, president of the Institute of Architects, Mr. J. B. Barlow, vice-president; and Mr. W. H. Bell, the deceased’s late partner. Three little boys are left to mourn the loss of a kind and devoted parent, and the bereavement presses harder on Mrs. Coward owing to her not having had the best of health lately.’**16**

A meeting was held in Mr. Stobo’s residence, Beecroft, Monday evening, 17th November. Its object was to consider what steps should be taken by residents of the district to fittingly mark their respect for the late Mr. W. G. Coward.

Mr. Frank Farnell, M.P., said that he had known the late Mr. Coward for several years, and had always found him an upright, honourable man in all his transactions.

Mr. C. C. Tucker stated ‘In the city, Mr. Coward had always been highly esteemed for his great professional ability, his manly upright manner, and general bearing. In him (the speaker) always felt he had a friend he could esteem, and one whose advice he often sought.’

Mr. H. R. Whittle stated that ‘he had known Mr. Coward perhaps longer than anyone in Beecroft, and felt that no matter how, on some occasions, appearances seemed to be against him, He was invariably actuated by the purest motives; and animated by a sincere desire to do anything which tended towards the progress of Beecroft. He was a man of great determination of character, and stood among the highest in his profession. In 1892 he was especially distinguished by being elected a member of the Royal Society of Architects. Mr. Whittle then enunciated several of the great buildings; works in the city and elsewhere, which had been designed and completed under Mr. Coward’s supervision, and said that he was largely responsible for the architectural beauty of the residences in Beecroft. His method of construction had recommended itself to the first building authorities in the land.’

Mr. W. H. E. Nicholle said that ‘Mr. Coward had always been looked upon as a man who, in his public capacity, had never flinched in devoting his time, energy and intellect to developing the best interests of the district.’ ‘Mr. Coward had always been looked upon as a man who, in his public capacity, had never flinched in devoting his time, energy and intellect to developing the best interests of the district. He moved persistently in many matters which were often thought unimportant, if not even trivial; but really were of great importance.’

Mr. A. Murray referred to the condition of Beecroft when Mr. Coward first came to it. ‘Then the streets were unformed, there was no railway station, buildings were few and far between, and poor structures at that. But with the coming of Mr. Coward the place seemed to suddenly take an upward tendency, and had gone on rapidly improving ever since.’

Mr. Rattray spoke sympathetically of his long and always pleasant acquaintance with Mr. Coward, who was at all times ready and willing to assist every private and public movement to the best of his ability; even to the affairs of their little church, in which he took a lively interest.

The public memorial never eventuated. Moneys received were returned by March 1897.**17**

In December 1894 his office furniture, including drawing tables and trestles, Australian chairs and stools, roll-top desk, and sundries were auctioned off. Also, that month, Mr. W. E. H. Nicholle became the new president of the Beecroft Progress Association, and a letter was read from Mrs. Coward, 'Enfield,' Mudgee, acknowledging the receipt of the letter of condolence from the Association.**18**

On 5th January 1895 a memorial tablet in memory of the late Mr. W. G. Coward was erected in St. John’s Church of England. The tablet occupies a position on the right side of the church, just above the seat that the deceased gentleman and his family used to occupy. It is made of white marble, resting on a black marble plate, beautifully designed, and is inscribed as follows: - “In loving memory of William Gratus Coward F.R.I.B.A., late trustee of this church. Died 9th November, 1894, aged 37 years. Erected by the parishioners. ‘Be ye also ready. Matt. 24, 44.” The tablet was unveiled on Sunday last during the ordinary afternoon service.’ The tablet cost £7.

The erection of the new bell at the church, which was rung for the first time on Christmas-day. It was the wish of William Gratus Coward that one should be erected at the church and rung on Christmas-day, and with this in mind he commenced the subscription list himself, the next to support it being Mr. C. C. Tucker.**19**

Duty was paid on the estate of the late W. G. Coward, Beecroft, net value of estate £3195.**20**

In May 1895 executors of the late W. G. Coward, claimed £10,000 from the Department of Railways. In June 1895 the first railway cases were heard, when Mrs. W. G. Coward and her three sons, aged from 4 to 9 years, claimed £10,000. The widow and her husband were both 37 years of age. The deceased, who was an architect, had his life insured for £1,000. His income for the last three years was just under £600. A verdict for £3,750 was given. Sir Julian Salomon, who appeared for the defendant, submitted that the widow was better off now than when her husband was alive, as deceased had lived in miserly style. She had now the house and insurance money.**21**

In July 1895 the Beecroft Progress Association submitted the name of Mr. W. Perdriau as an approved trustee for the park in lieu of the late Mr. W. G. Coward.**22**

In May 1896 Mrs. Coward was once more bereaved by the death of her brother, Mr. George Crossing, of Mudgee.**23**

In June 1896 the memorial lectern ordered by Mrs. W. G. Coward had arrived from England and forwarded to the Beecroft Church of England trustees, to be placed in St. John’s Church as a memorial to her late husband, Mr. W. G. Coward.**24**

**Tenders advertised by W. G. Coward or W.G. Coward and W. H. Bell**

**In November 1884 W. G. Coward commenced his profession of architect at Scott’s-chamber, 96 Pitt Street, Sydney.**

May 1885 – Painters and Builders – cleaning down and painting the exteriors of nine houses, Rialto-Terrace, Upper William-street South

May 1885 – for Builders – erection and addition of Ball and Billiard Rooms to home at Burwood

Jun 1885 – Builders - erection and completion of a villa residence at Bowral

Jun 1885 – Builders – erection and completion of a Baker’s shop, with dwelling-house and offices attached, flour store, bakehouse, bread-room, and stabling, in Castlereagh-street, Redfern

Jul 1885 – Builders – extensive alterations and additions to St. Catherine’s Clergy Daughters’ School, Waverley

Sep 1885 – Contractors – taking down premises in Liverpool-street

Dec 1885 – Contractors – excavation, masonry, and brickwork of extensive business premises (six shops or stores) to be erected in Liverpool-street

Jan 1886 – Builders – erection and completion of first-class music and billiard rooms, adjoining residence in Victoria-street, Ashfield

Feb 1886 – Ironmongers – supplying 18 cast-iron columns

Feb 1886 – Contractors – erection of a villa residence at Homebush

Mar 1886 – Contractors – erection and addition of billiard, music and other rooms to Clovelly, Ashfield

Aug 1886 – Excavators – excavation at rear of premises in Liverpool-street

Apr 1886 – Contractors – for taking down premises in Liverpool-street

May 1886 – Contractors – additions to “Wyandra,” Elizabeth-street, Ashfield

Jun 1886 – Contractors – finishing trades in extensive additions to a residence at Ashfield

Jun 1886 – Tar Paving, etc.

Jul 1886 – Plasterers – cementing and plastering to block of six shops, in Liverpool-street

Jul 1886 – Plumbers – plumbing work to block of six shops, in Liverpool-street

Aug 1886 – drainage to block of shops in Liverpool-street

**Advertising, 30 August 1886 - William Gratus Coward and William Haughton Bell entered into partnership as architects, under the style of Coward and Bell, at Tattersall’s-chambers, Hunter-street, city.**

Sep 1886 – Builders – erection of a pair of semi-detached houses, at North Shore

Nov 1886 – Contractors – erection of a block of four shops with offices and showrooms, to be erected in Pitt-street

Nov 1886 – Contractors – ventilation of all Saints’ Church, Petersham

Nov 1886 – Contractors – additions and alterations to the Turkish Baths, Bligh-street

Jan 1887 – Contractors – erection of a detached painting room, at St. Catherine’s Clergy Daughters’ School, Waverley

Jan 1887 – new flooring, painting and general repairs to premises lately occupied as Church Society’s House and Diocesan Registry

Jan 1887 – Contractors – erection of a cottage hospital at the King’s School, Parramatta

Jan 1887 – Contractors – painting, re-roofing, and other repairs to St. Andrew’s School, Pitt-street

Jan 1887 – Contractors – flooring, painting, etc., to premises in Phillip-street

Feb 1887 – Contractors – painting and renovating the whole of the interior of Warrena, Moore Park-road; also for re-erection of laundry and fencing to same

Mar 1887 – Contractors and Bricklayers – erection of brick walls to a large produce store (at present enclosed with wood and iron), Ultimo-road, Ultimo

Apr 1887 – Contractors – erection of a large block of offices in O’Connell-street

May 1887 - Contractors – erection of All Soul’s Vicarage, at Leichhardt

Sep 1887 – Contractors, Landscape gardeners, etc. – formation of asphalt tennis court and pathways, turfing, drainage, erection of retaining walls, fencing and outhouses, at Wyoming, Petersham

Sep 1887 – Contractors, etc. – tar paving, turfing, drainage, light iron railing, etc., to ground in front of St. Andrew’s School, Pitt-street

Oct 1887 – Licensed Drainers and Plumbers – drainage and plumbing to Warrena, Moore Park-road

Oct 1887 - Sir Moses Montefliore Jewish Home

Nov 1887 – erection of a pair of semi-detached houses in Denham-street, Glebe

Dec 1887 – Contractors – erection of a large first-class store at corner of Barrack and Clarence streets, for Moses Joseph

Jan 1888 – Contractors – erection of a large weatherboard cottage at Bowral

Jan 1888 – Contractors – alterations and additions and general repairs to Camden House, Milson’s Point

Jan 1888 – Contractors – alterations to roof of premises, Moore Park-road

Feb 1888 – Contractors – alterations, additions, etc., to Camden House, Milson’s Point

Mar 1888 – Contractors – alterations and additions to two houses in Park-lane

Mar 1888 – Contractors – erection of St. Anne’s Parsonage, Strathfield

Apr 1888 – Contractors – erection of a shop and dwelling-house in Glebe Point-road; also for alterations to adjoining house

Apr 1888 – Painters and Contractors – painting and general repairs to Forest Lodge, Pyrmont Bridge-road, Forest Lodge

Apr 1888 – Contractors - alterations and additions to a house at Long Nose Point

May 1888 – Contractors – erection of the first portion of a large stone cottage residence at Pennant Hills, near Beecroft Station

Jun 1888 – Contractors – erection of terrace of five houses in Ross-street, Forest Lodge

Jun 1888 – Contractors – alterations and additions to Wyoming, Shaw-street, Petersham

Jun 1888 – Contractors – erection of a pair of first-class semi-detached villa residence, Stanmore

Sep 1888 – Painters and Contractors – painting, papering and general repairs to Huntingdon and Lorraine, Charlotte-street, Ashfield

Oct 1888 – Contractors – erection of a shop and dwelling, in Elizabeth-street, Redfern

Dec 1888 – Contractors – pulling down three houses in College-street, near Liverpool-street, including purchase of materials

Jan 1889 – Contractors – erection of a brick cottage residence at Bowral

Jan 1889 – Contractors – erection of two first-class residences in College-street

Mar 1889 – Contractors – erection of a residence, at Bexley

Mar 1889 – Contractors – erection of two shops, photographic gallery, etc., in William-street

Apr 1889 – Contractors – erection of the first portion of the Moore Theological College, Bligh-street, Camperdown

Apr 1889 – Contractors – alterations to premises, No. 5 Hunter-street

Apr 1889 – Contractors – residence of Bexley

May 1889 – Contractors – erection of ball and billiard rooms and other additions to Aston, Rose Bay

Jul 1889 – Contractors – alterations and additions to main building, and also to stables, of Airedale, Smith-street, Summer Hill

Jul 1889 – Bluestone Quarry Proprietors and Contractors – providing and laying bluestone sets, about 315 square yards

Sep 1889 – Contractors – erection of a doctor’s residence in Glebe Point-road

Nov 1889 – Medical Men, etc. – lease, not exceeding 2 years, of 34 and 36 College-street

Nov 1889 – Contractors and Plasterers – cementing exterior walls of a residence at Waverley

Jan 1890 – Contractors – pulling down two dwelling-houses in Kent-street, and purchase of old materials in same

Jan 1890 - Contractors and Stonemasons – additions to Lianthony, Gladesville

Feb 1890 – Stonemasons, Paviors, etc. – purchase of a quantity of stone flagging in the city

May 1890 – Contractors – pulling down and re-erecting A.S.N. Hotel, corner of George and Argyle streets; also, for erection of shop premises adjoining same

Aug 1890 – Contractors – pulling down and re-erecting business premises, lower George-street, opposite Bridge-street

Aug 1890 – Builders and Contractors – block of offices, O’Connell-street, for the Imperial Insurance Company of London

Mar 1891 – Contractors – erection of business premises in George-street, near Royal Hotel

**Partnership hitherto existing between William Gratus Coward and William Haughton Bell, under the style or firm of Coward and Bell, Architects, Turkish-Chambers, 29 Bligh-street, Sydney, was dissolved on the 30th June 1891**

Sep 1891 – Builders and Contractors – erection of a weatherboard cottage residence at Beecroft

Sep 1891 – Builders and Contractors – erection of a shop and dwelling, at the corner of George and Globe street, city

Oct 1891 – Contractors - erection of a family residence at Strathfield

Feb 1892 – Contractors – erection of three two-storied workshops in Park-lane, Hyde Park

Mar 1892 – Contractors – alterations to ground floor of Carrington Hall

Mar 1892 – Contractors – erection of three workshops in Park-lane, Hyde Park

Mar 1892 – Builders and Contractors – purchase and removal of a quantity of sound cast-iron balcony railing, frieze, small columns, and wood fittings, from the ground floor of Carrington Hall, Castlereagh-street

May 1892 – Ironworkers – supplying and fixing at Camden-buildings, George-street, six wrought-iron frames for name plates

Aug 1892 – Contractors – erection of a block of business premises in George-street, next Royal Hotel

Sep 1892 – Contractors – erection of a villa residence in Webb’s Avenue, Ashfield

Nov 1892 – Contractors – alterations, etc., to premises in George-street, adjoining Café Francais

Feb 1893 – Contractors – erection of St. Michael’s Church of England Parsonage, Wollongong

Apr 1893 – Painters – painting exterior walls of a residence at Homebush

Jun 1893 – Contractors – re-erection of the Imperial Hotel, Mt. Victoria

Sep 1893 – Contractors – erection of two brick villa residences in West-street, North Sydney

Sep 1893 – Contractors – erection of new business premises, etc., in George-street, next Royal Hotel

Feb 1894 – Contractors – erection of a pair of semi-detached houses in Wattle-street, Ultimo

Apr 1894 – Iron workers – erection of an awning to a block of six shops in Liverpool-street

May 1894 – Stonemasons and Contractors – supplying and fixing iron palisading gates, stone piers, and coping to a residence at Long Nose Point

Jul 1894 – Contractors – weatherboard additions to St John’s Church of England, Beecroft

Jul 1894 – Contractors – erection of a shop and dwelling at Forest Lodge

Aug 1894 – Contractors – erection of block of 17 shops, George-street

Jul 1894 – Contractors – erection of a shop and dwelling at Forest Lodge

**Bibliography**

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2 The Sydney Morning Herald, Sat 1 Nov 1884; Bowral Free Press and Berrima District Intelligencer, Sat 13 Mar 1886

3 The Sydney Morning Herald, Tue 28 Apr 1885; NSW Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages

4 The Sydney Morning Herald, Tue 30 Mar 1886; The Sydney Morning Herald, Thu 1 Dec 1887; The Sydney Morning Herald, Tue 9 Jun 1891

5 The Sydney Morning Herald, Mon 30 Aug 1886; The Sydney Morning Herald, Fri 2 Sep 1887; The Sydney Morning Herald, Sat 4 Jul 1891; The Daily Telegraph, Thu 4 Feb 1892

6 The Sydney Mail and New South Wales Advertiser, Sat 26 Mar 1887 (with photo)

7 The Sydney Morning Herald, Sat 21 Apr 1888; The Sydney Morning Herald, Fri 29 Jan 1892

8 The Sydney Morning Herald, Sat 16 Mar 1889

9 The Daily Telegraph, Thu 2 May 1889; The Daily Telegraph, Wed 1 Oct 1890

10 The Sydney Morning Herald, Sat 14 Feb 1891; The Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers

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11 Evening News, Wed 13 May 1891

12 The Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers Advocate, Sat 20 Feb 1892

13 The Sydney Morning Herald, Sat 8 Oct 1892

14 The Cumberland Mercury, Sat 30 Jun 1894

15 Geelong Advertiser, Thu 1 Nov 1894; The Sydney Morning Herald, Thu 1 Nov 1894; The Cumberland Mercury, Sat 3 Nov 1894; The Daily Telegraph, Sat 10 Nov 1894; The Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers Advocate, Sat 17 Nov 1894

16 The Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers Advocate, Sat 17 Nov 1894

17 The Daily Telegraph, Wed 21 Nov 1894; The Cumberland Mercury, Sat 24 Nov 1894; The Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers Advocate, Sat 13 Mar 1897

18 The Sydney Morning Herald, Wed 5 Dec 1894; The Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers Advocate, Sat 8 Dec 1894

19 The Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers Advocate, Sat 12 Jan 1895

20 The Sydney Morning Herald, Tue 8 Jan 1895

21 Wagga Wagga Express, Thu 20 Jun 1895

22 The Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers Advocate, Sat 13 Jul 1895

23 The Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers Advocate, Sat 9 May 1896

24 The Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers Advocate, Sat 20 Jun 1896

**NOTE**: Additional information contained within Beecroft Cheltenham History Group website and book ‘Beecroft and Cheltenham, the Shaping of a Sydney Community to 1914’.