

Royal Western Australian Historical Society's
Annual Pioneers Memorial Service
on Sunday 7th June 1992 at St Bartholomews Chapel, East Perth Cemeteries,

Commemorating Edmund Birch

Citation by Mr Rodney Gifford

Edmund was born in Staffordshire in 1831 and was 11 years old when his father and mother, Lewis and Hannah Birch, and the remainder of the family stepped ashore at Australind with others who participated in that ill-fated Western Australian Company project. With his father a medical man and chemist and his older brother already a qualified chemist, it is not surprising that the young man was apprenticed to George Shenton, Perth's first apothecary. After five years there, Edmund spent the next three as dispenser and assistant to the Surgeon in the Colonial Hospital in St George's Terrace. It is believed he was the first in that role. After the passing of the Medical Ordinance Act in 1869, Edmund registered as doctor, but never practiced. Indeed, his many and varied activities would have given him little time to do so.

In the 1860's Edmund and his brother Lewis, who died shortly after, built a two storied business and family dwelling on the corner opposite where the Town Hall was later built. They set up as chemists and druggists.

Edmund's ability and interest in financial affairs was evident when he acquired sufficient shares in the Western Australian Bank to become one of its Directors. He also became a Director of the Perth Building Society and at the time of his death was the Society's Chairman. The satisfactory state of his finances allowed him to support (through the Electro Magnetic Telegraph Company) such a venture as the building of telegraph lines to Albany, Bunbury, York and Newcastle.

Edmund was a member of the Perth Town Trust and when the Trust became the Perth City Council he was elected to represent the Central Ward. Then in 1873, on the retirement of J G C Carr, he was elected as one of the two members for Perth in the Legislative Council and retained the seat at the next elections.

The other activities of this versatile and energetic man, who fathered seven sons and a daughter, included an involvement with the Perth Company of the Rifle Volunteer Corps, of which he eventually took command. He retained a deep and lasting interest in the Congregational Church and was a Deacon for twelve years. Reflecting the strong association of all the churches with education, he served for some time on an Education Board, made up of nominees from all denominations. He was a Provincial Grand Master of the City of Perth Lodge of Oddfellows, a Brother of the Park Lodge of Freemasons and, at the time of his death, Vice President of the Perth Working Men's Association.

Edmund's tragic death, as the result of injuries from a fire, at the age of 44 years, cut short the beginnings of a brilliant career.