

JOHN CHURCHILL SIMPSON (1911–1998)

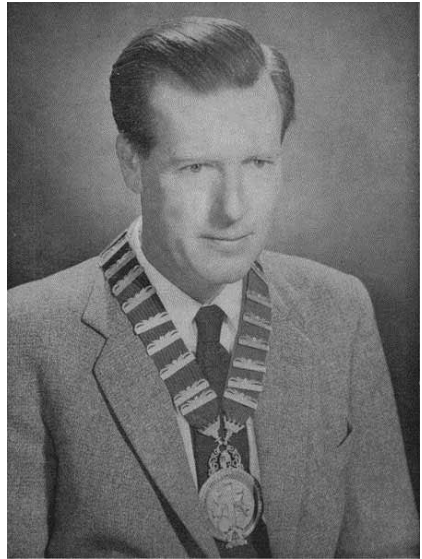
by Arthur Gammage

ARCHITECT and artist J.C. Simpson was a Durbanite who completed his initial training and practised in the city under or in partnership with local architects. I knew of his drawings and paintings from calendars and from the illustrations for *Durban's Heritage Explored* (1990) by former colleagues Peter Johnston and Hyacinthia Naidoo, but only recently learned of his earlier career as an architect.

Simpson was articled to A. Stanley Frost from 1927 to 1930, studying part-time at the Technical College and as an external student of University of the Witwatersrand. Then he worked for Geoffrey le Sueur until 1934, a time associated with early modernist architecture. Having been awarded the Emma Smith scholarship, he spent six months at Florence University in Italy and two years at the Architectural Association in London. Returning home in 1938, he started his own practice, but the following year this was cut short by World War II, during which he served in the navy.

In 1944 he renewed his association with Le Sueur, becoming a partner in the firm. His designs, undertaken in the name of G. le Sueur & Partners, include the following:

- Dunlop Tyre offices and factory additions, Sydney Road
- Yarningdale and Barcelona, Marine Parade
- Methodist Church, Smith Street (now Anton Lembede Street)
- Technical College residences, Manning Road
- Customs House, Victoria Embankment (now Margaret Mncadi Avenue)



John Churchill Simpson

- Chemistry Block, University of Natal, Durban
- Library, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg
- SA Eagle Building, Smith and West streets.

Simpson's design of a mural in 1968 for the Eagle Building, which contains Murchie's Passage, was a turning point in his working life and he then dedicated himself to fine art. Encouraged by Everard Read, he held several exhibitions. His paintings appeared on Adams Bookshop calendars for some years and he was a close friend of the family, for whom he designed a house at 23 Lansdowne Road, Durban North. Peter Adams describes him as a delightful character who loved books and had an account with the shop, often settled in kind by means of his artworks. He also enjoyed travelling and brought back pictures he had produced from such places as Italy and Zanzibar.



Dunlop Tyre offices, Sydney Road



*Customs House, Victoria
Embankment (courtesy Kevan
Mardon)*



*Adams & Co. (courtesy
Peter Adams)*