

**Graham, Herbert Ernst (1911–1982)** by [David Black](#) This article was published in [Australian Dictionary of Biography](#), Volume 17, (MUP), 2007



Herb and Beryl Graham, 1960.

Herbert Ernst Graham (1911-1982), draftsman and politician, was born on 6 April 1911 at Narrogin, in the Western Australian wheat-belt, second child of South Australian-born parents William Le Fevre Graham, farmer, and his wife Thekla Emma, née Pustkutchen. Educated at Narrogin State and Northam High schools, Herbert was employed by the Department of Lands and Surveys as a cadet draftsman (1928-34) and by the **Forests Department** as a draftsman (1934-44). He was promoted to first-class draftsman in 1941. On 15 January 1936 at St Mary's Catholic Cathedral, Perth, he married Norma Eileen Wilson.

Having joined the Australian Labor Party in 1929, Graham had been a member of the party's State executive from 1933. Twice he attempted to enter Federal politics: in 1934 he stood as the ALP candidate for the House of Representatives seat of Perth and in 1940 for the Senate. In 1942 he was elected president of the Perth Trades Hall and of the metropolitan district council of the ALP. On 14 August 1943 he won the Legislative Assembly seat of East Perth in the by-election that followed the resignation of [Tom Hughes](#). Resigned from Forests Department 30.6.1944. He was to represent East Perth until 1962 and then, after the electorate disappeared in a re-distribution, Balcatta. After Labor's defeat in the 1947 State election Herb Graham played an active parliamentary and public role in the Opposition ranks, especially in the campaign against capital punishment. A big, amiable man, he was nevertheless known for his bellicose oratorical style. He served on the Joint House Committee in 1947-53. Divorced in 1951, on 5 January 1952 at the district registrar's office, Cannington, he married Beryl Grace Kirkby, a clerk.

When the [Albert Hawke](#) Labor government came to power in February 1953 **Graham was appointed minister for both housing and forests**. A somewhat contentious minister for forests, he soon ousted [Theodore Stoate](#) as **conservator of forests**. As minister for housing he relieved the postwar housing shortage by rapidly increasing the number of State Housing Commission homes. He also took over the transport portfolio in April 1956. In 1957 he chaired the joint select committee inquiring into the provisions of the Metropolitan (Perth) Passenger Transport Trust Bill; the subsequent Act introduced a modern co-ordinated bus system to Perth. Back in Opposition after 1959, he became steadily more prominent in Labor's parliamentary party and on 13 December 1966, when J. T. Tonkin replaced Hawke as leader, was chosen as deputy-leader. Labor regained power with a one-seat majority on 20 February 1971 and Graham became deputy-premier and minister for industrial development (development from 12 October 1971) and decentralisation. He was also minister for town planning until 7 February 1973 and for the North-West (from 12 October 1971).

As problems mounted for the government, including threats to supply, Graham became increasingly frustrated and at odds with Tonkin. On 30 May 1973 he resigned from parliament, coincidentally during the celebration of the first Western Australia Week, a concept that he had conceived and inaugurated. Having campaigned strongly for reform of the State's liquor laws, he was appointed to a three-year term as chairman of the Licensing Court of Western Australia. As chairman he encouraged a diversification of drinking outlets, favouring taverns over hotels, and extended drinking hours. His departure from politics almost brought down the government; in the by-election that followed, the future premier Brian Burke won his seat by thirty votes thus preserving Labor's slender parliamentary majority. A man of compassion but a tough politician, Graham had fallen just short of leading the party to which he had devoted his political life.

Graham was a board-member (1930-53) of the Australian Natives' Association of Western Australia. Developing close connections with the Italian community, he learnt to speak the language fluently, became a life member of the Western Australia Italian Club and in 1968 was appointed an officer of the Order of Merit of the Italian Republic. In later years he was patron or life member of several sporting clubs—including East Perth Football Club (1957-76), and Osborne Park and Forrest Park bowling clubs—the Western Australian Debating League and the Tree Society of

Western Australia. He died of cancer on 17 March 1982 at Stirling and was cremated with Uniting Church forms. His wife, their daughter and son, and the daughter and two sons of his first marriage, survived him.

### Select Bibliography

- *West Australian*, 3 May 1968, p 8, 3 Mar 1971, p 1, 24 May 1973, p 5, 18 Mar 1982, p 9
- *Daily News* (Perth), 2 May 1973, p 5
- *Labor Voice*, Apr 1982, p 13
- Graham papers (State Library of Western Australia)