

**“ It’s a very rare thing
in this day and age for
anything to last for a long
period** - Christopher Brine

DYNASTIES



The background features a large, stylized white graphic of a person with arms raised, set against a light pink background with falling white leaves. At the bottom, a dark blue horizontal band contains a stylized city skyline in shades of blue and grey, which serves as a base for the word 'DYNASTIES'.



Tony Brine (right) with son Christopher Brine, who now oversees the company's operations as managing director. Photo: Attila Csaszar



FIFTH GENERATION BUILDS ON HISTORY



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Family business AT Brine & Sons has played a prominent role in shaping Perth for more than 120 years, constructing some of the city's most notable buildings.

FROM waistcoats, makeshift pulleys and scant concerns over safety to high-vis jackets, cranes and wide-ranging OH&S regulations, building sites have changed dramatically since AT Brine & Sons started out in the industry more than 120 years ago.

One component that has remained constant throughout, however,

– Tony doing a bachelor of arts at the University of Western Australia to teach, and Christopher's BA at UWA focused on music – but returning to the fold at a later date.

"The company has gone through various shapes and sizes over the years," Christopher told *Business News*.

"There have been periods where it's been fairly inactive; during the world wars it was quiet.

"Back in the early 1900s, AT Brine had hundreds of employees; it had its own quarry, stone masons, a joinery shop that built its own windows and doors, carpenters, plasterers and bricklayers ... the industry has evolved since then and it's mostly subcontractor-based now."

Foundations

In the 1890s, the late AT Brine, who came to WA from Victoria, completed his first building job in Perth – a small cottage on Leeder Street, now Carr Street, in Leederville.

The company went on to secure contracts for the construction of Graylands Hospital, the State War Memorial in Kings Park as well as the WA Trustee Building and the Royal Insurance

Building on St Georges Terrace.

It was also appointed to undertake the £12,227 conversion of the Town Hall's ground floor council offices into shops in 1925.

By 1929, the firm had more than £450,000 in contracts for works on UWA's Winthrop Hall, the expansion of St Mary's Cathedral at Victoria Square, and for the Perth Metropolitan Markets, on the site where Watertown Brand Outlet Centre is now located.

A few years later, the company signed a £63,257 contract for extension works to Wellington Street department store Boans, now Forrest Chase, and later built the First Church of Christ, Scientist, an art deco edifice still standing at the top end of St Georges Terrace.

In the 1960s, the company built both the Fremantle Ports' administration building and Fremantle Passenger Terminal.

Beyond sculpting the cityscape, the Brines were active in the community; the late WL Brine was president of the Master Builders Association (1935-37), as was KI Brine (1962-63), who also helped set up

the builders' registration board and was on the board of Guildford Grammar School and Princess Margaret Hospital.

Tony Brine said there had been one break in the lineage when his grandfather went off to World War II and his great uncle didn't.

This resulted in his great uncle running the business for subsequent years until 1979.

"They started to get beaten on a lot of the contracts because the 'Multiplexes' had moved in by then and my great uncle's side didn't want to continue the company in its old structure," he said.

This growing competition from new, larger players led AT Brine & Sons to wind down its project list during the 1960s and 1970s, with its final major work being Oakleigh House, a nine-storey office building on St Georges Terrace (to which additional storeys were added in 2008 to create Condor Tower).

Although there was nothing in the way of future contracts or physical assets, Tony said he was thrilled to be offered the business name.

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1894

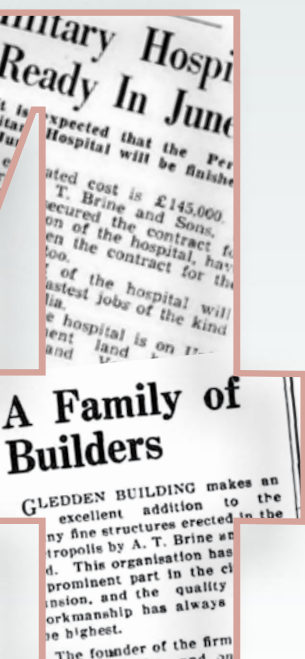
YEAR AT BRINE & SONS ESTABLISHED

is the business's family connections.

Today, Christopher Brine, the great, great grandson of the business's founder, Alfred Tonkin Brine, oversees the company's operations as managing director.

Two years ago, he took over from his father, Tony, who still works in the business a few days a week and says building is not just in their lineage, but in their blood.

There's no doubt the call of the family business is strong, with both initially setting out on different career paths





TRIBUTE: The State War memorial was built in 1929, after AT Brine secured a £3,500 tender in 1927.

Photo: Courtesy of the State Library of Western Australia

Photos: Attila Csaszar

UPGRADE: The builder's expansion work on St Mary's Cathedral, which was originally erected in 1894, was completed by 1930. **Photo:** Courtesy of the State Library of Western Australia



Fifth generation builds on history

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"I'd been a school teacher for 10 weeks and didn't like it. I'd worked with my grandfather, I still have his tools; he was a carpenter by trade, and dad used to take me out on jobs since I was a kid," he said.

"I was proud as punch that they wanted me to take it on."

Continuity

One feature of the original company that did carry through to its new iteration was its culture, particularly regarding its practice of

full-time employment, rather than subcontracting work out.

"It's not all square metre rates and making money, it's also about trying to provide a human service so that our people working on jobs care and have a bit of a vested interest in supporting and promoting the company," Tony said.

"Many may say it's not cost-effective but we find it's the way of doing a quality job."

Christopher, who started full time in the business in 2003 shortly after graduating from university (and assessing his options in the music world), has retained this family value, with a current pipeline mostly consisting of renovations and million-dollar bespoke residences.

"We're a small company now employ around 30-35 people," he said.

"Because of that, when

people work with us they deal with me. Its old school; a lot of companies these days are becoming impersonal and systemised online, but I think people want that personal touch.

"Commercial work has changed; it's highly competitive, we still do some warehouse and factory developments, but nothing like in the past.

"We don't advertise; it's all word-of-mouth and repeat customers.



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CITYSCAPE:

The Royal Insurance Building and WA Trustees Building (far right) were constructed by the company on St Georges Terrace in 1925.

Photo: Courtesy of the State Library of Western Australia

"Last week a lady rang up because my grandfather built her father a home in the 1950s and she wanted us to renovate her house."

Christopher said the team had also worked on the relocation of the Talbot Hobbs Memorial from Elizabeth Quay to the Supreme Court Gardens, all because of a plaque on the side noting AT Brine & Sons had built it.

"It's funny, these connections," he said.

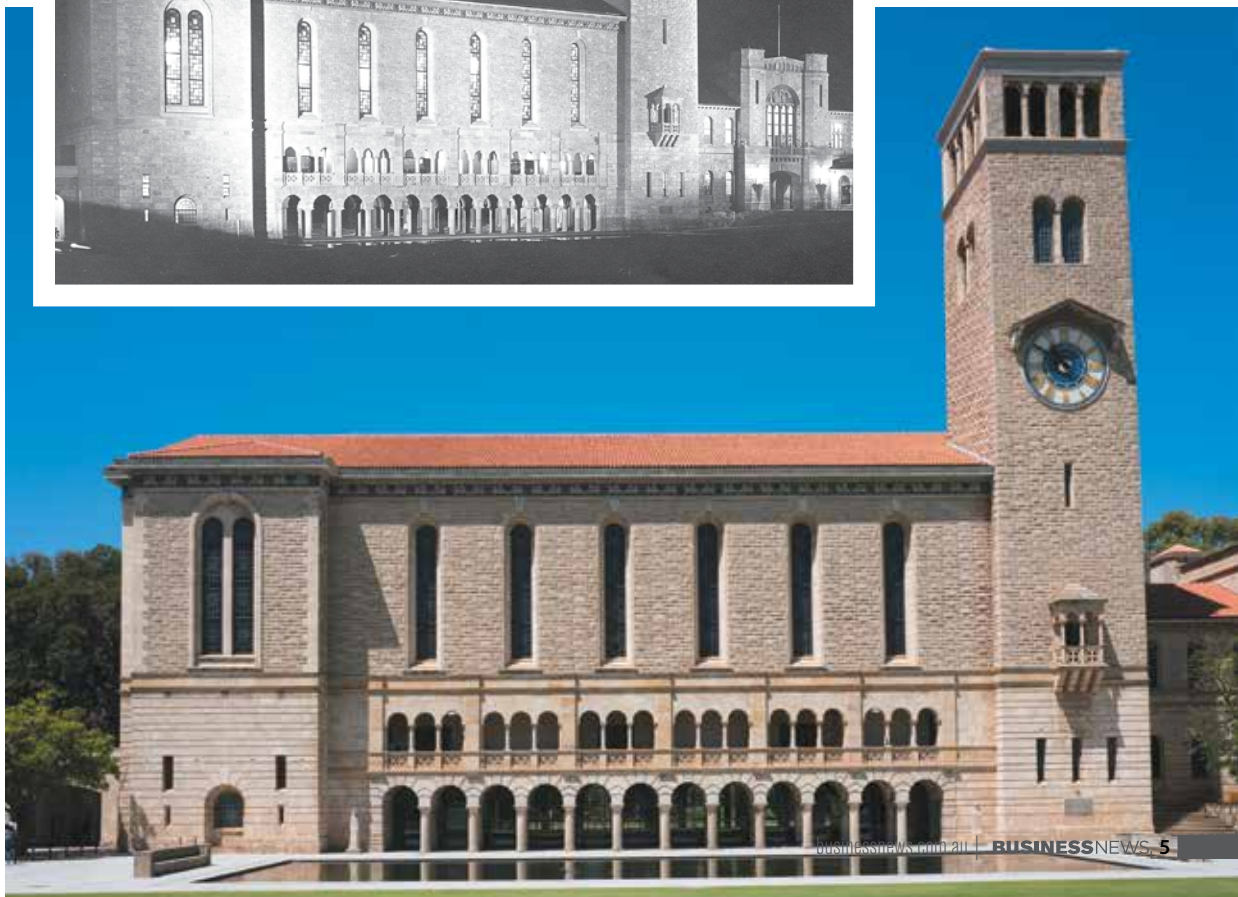
"That was part of the reason why I took over the business. It's a very rare thing in this day and age for anything to last for a long period.

"I've always been involved in the company; my 'apprenticeship' was my whole life. Being the eldest grandson of the Brine dynasty, I didn't want to be the fifth generation that ended it."



PRISTINE:

The University of Western Australia's Winthrop Hall still stands as it did when it was completed in 1932. **Photo:** Courtesy of the University of Western Australia





PASSION FOR SEAFOOD BEATS SELLING SPUDS

The Catalano family has delivered continuity of ownership of its seafood business across three generations, but has implemented several strategic shifts along the way.



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THE Catalano family name has been associated with Western Australia's seafood industry since Francesco Catalano purchased a fish and chip shop in Cannington in 1969.

The business has morphed and grown over the decades as successive family members have joined the operation, with Catalano's Seafood today headed by Francesco's two sons, Nick and Paul.

Catalano's operates from its Bassendean factory-direct outlet, where the product is processed and packaged

and distributed to the business's four shopping centre retail outlets and 11 franchised operations within supermarkets and stores.

Catalano's also sells wholesale to IGA supermarkets, with 2,500 tonnes of seafood making its way to WA consumers annually.

Managing director Nick Catalano and business development manager Paul Catalano were 15 and 13, respectively, when they began working in their father's shop with their younger sister, Marie.

Journeying from the south of Italy to the



south of WA in 1950, Mr Catalano (snr) secured a job at a sawmill north-east of Harvey.

"He was able to work in the mill during the week, and on the weekends he

would ride his push bike about 40 kilometres to work on a (potato) farm," Nick told *Business News*.

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GROWTH: David Catalano (left), Mark Lupica, Nick, and Josh Catalano at Catalano's Seafood Whitfords retail outlet.
Photo: Attila Csaszar

“ What I still find satisfying is my grandfather had no idea what he was going to create, and the company is still called Catalano's Seafood and it's still owned by the family nearly 60 years later - Josh Catalano

Passion for seafood beats selling spuds



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"Within two years he brought mum and his brother Joe to Australia, and within a couple of years the two brothers bought the farm."

There was little profit to be had growing potatoes during that time, Nick said, primarily due to legislative restrictions.

Nick's youngest son, Josh Catalano, said given the tough conditions his grandfather began selling potatoes illegally to support his family.

"He had this old postal truck and he used to sell potatoes in the night because people used to think he was the mail delivery guy; he used to drop potatoes off to all the fish and chip shops all over Perth," he said.

"I think they (the police) caught him out, so he knew he had to do something different.

"He literally loaded the kids and the family in the car two days later and they drove to Perth from Waroona to start selling fish and chips."

Development

Nick said he and his brother, Paul, became more heavily involved in the business once they left school.

"We had this great idea to do a bit of wholesaling and expand our retail and so that's how it started," he said.

He and Paul bought a truck and sold any excess fish unused by the shop at the local markets.

"I think for the first 17 years we worked seven days and seven nights. What was it like? It was hard work," Nick said.

Catalano's first factory-direct operation started in 1985.

"The idea was we'd build half a dozen (wet) fish shops in the shopping centres," he said, giving his father the task of managing their first store at Carousel.

In about 1995, the unexpected challenges of rolling out a series of traditional wet fresh-fish retail outlets put the retail expansion on pause, with Nick and Paul instead refocusing on the wholesale aspect of the business, supplying to about 40 Coles outlets, and hospitality venues within WA and in other states.

Nick and Paul had another shot at retail in about 2005, this time employing managers from outside the family to operate the stores.

Nick's eldest son, David, said the company stopped wholesaling to hospitality venues overnight, continuing to supply supermarkets.

"We were in a really difficult place, the business was struggling and we made a complete business change from wholesale to retail and we had to lay off over 30 staff members and change our whole business direction," David said.

"That was really hairy; it took a lot of work, but we're still here today."

He said while retail today made up the bulk of the brand, another business arm included contracts by other seafood companies that sent their produce to the Catalano warehouse for processing, packaging and distribution.

Third generation

The third generation working in the business today are Nick's sons David (operations manager) and Andrew (production manager),

and his sister's son Mark Lupica (retail manager).

David said it didn't take long to embrace the family business.

"When you see how much effort has been put in from the generation before you so you can have all the things you've been able to have, you just need to keep that going," he said.

Josh worked in the business for years while simultaneously managing food projects of his own, marketing the family business along the way.

"The third generation is always the hardest because we've lived and breathed that business constantly and you've got that second generation ahead that wants to hand over and move on but is still institutionalised in the business," Josh said.

"I was the youngest and I butted heads with my brothers and that's just about the vision; they didn't really share the same vision for me and that's why I did my own thing."

Josh said he stopped working within the business two years ago to focus on launching his own fish-centric food truck business with chef Stuart Fergusson, The Fish Boss, supplied by Catalano's.

"What I still find satisfying is my grandfather had no idea what he was going to create and the company is still called Catalano's Seafood and it's still owned by the family nearly 60 years later," he said.

In September this year, their withstanding work ethic and commitment to WA seafood was recognised with the induction of the Catalano family into the Family Business Australia hall of fame.



DYNASTIES

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167 Dynasty focused companies published by *Business News*.

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Richgro

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VOC Group

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Karragullen Cool Storage

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