



## ROBIN S. DODS

### The Life and Work of a Distinguished Queensland Architect

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**B**EFORE the advent of a new generation of architects trained in the revitalised Australia of post-World War II, very few Queensland architects had contributed to the architectural advancement of their State. Of these few, the work of Robin Smith Dods must be acknowledged the most original and vital.

Robin was one of three sons of Robert Dods, a New Zealand merchant, and was born at Dunedin on 9 June 1868. The family moved to the United Kingdom in 1870 and settled there. Robert Dods died some five years later, and in 1876 his family returned to New Zealand.

Mrs. Dods subsequently married Dr. C. F. Marks, a well-known Queensland medical practitioner and politician. The doctor established his family in a large timber residence at 101 Wickham Terrace in the centre of what has become Brisbane's medical community. The house still stands, somewhat neglected and shabby, but recognisable by features of detail incorporated by Robin Dods, who remodelled the building in later years.

The school life of Robin appears to have passed uneventfully. He was educated firstly at a small private school, and from 1881 to 1886 he attended the Brisbane Boys' Grammar School as a boarder. The school record proclaims that he was "honourable and good-natured, neat with pen and pencil; not distinguished in class work." Some 34 years later Mr. A. E. Brooks, F.R.A.I.A., mentions in Dods' obituary that "(he) displayed at an early age strong architectural proclivities."

According to the fashion of the day when young men moved abroad to further their educations, Robin was sent "Home" after completing his term at the Brisbane Grammar School. He arrived in Edinburgh in 1886, and in the same year joined the architectural firm of Hay and Henderson as an articled pupil. He worked by day and in the evenings attended the Edinburgh Architectural Association work

classes. His employment with this firm lasted some three years, after which he moved to London to the design branch of the Imperial War Office.

Whilst at the War Office, Dods worked under architects Ingress Bell and W. Dunn, the latter being an early authority on reinforced concrete. A. Lethbridge was chief assistant at the time, and it was under his direction that Robin assisted in the preparation of the drawings for the Horse Guards Barracks in London.

He entered competition designs for both the Tate and Soane Medallion Prizes, but although his entries were of high standard, no success in these competitions came his way. The designs were executed in 17th century Gothic style and architecturally broke no new ground.

In 1891 he accepted an offer to work in the offices of Sir Aston Webb, R.A., F.R.I.B.A., and his partner Ingress Bell. It is recorded that Dods won for the office the competition for additions to Christ's Hospital School, including the Chapel, at Horsham. The scheme was carried out in the style of the Gothic Revivalists. Also in this office, Dods worked on the drawings of the Birmingham Assize Courts; but how far, if at all, he influenced the design is not known. Sir Aston Webb was responsible for the design of the Royal Naval College at Dartmouth, and Dods, if not directly concerned with the design of the whole scheme, is credited with the design of the Chapel.

In London, as in Edinburgh, Robin Dods soon became a fashionable "man-about-town." He possessed great natural charm, ready wit, and an ability to gain the friendship and acquaintance of a large number of people in the world of art and architecture. Numbered among his friends were architects Giles Gilbert Scott, Robert Lorimer, John Belcher, G. F. Bodley, Norman Shaw and H. B. Creswell, and a theatrical trainer and Shakespearean reciter, Patrick Kirwan.

The association with Creswell ("Honeywood File") helped to foster an interest in writing, for Robin Dods later did write many articles on architecture and furniture.

Dods visited the Continent in 1891 for a study tour of Italy. It was in Naples that he met Charles Rennie MacIntosh, who was also travelling to fulfil the terms of the Alexander Thompson Scholarship which he had won the previous year. MacIntosh was destined to be recognised as one of the pioneers of the Modern Movement, and this meeting could have influenced Dods' architectural outlook. Also on this trip Robin met an American girl, Mary King, who was also on a European tour. The young couple became engaged, but each continued on their separate

ways. It was not until seven years later that the engagement was terminated by their marriage in Sydney, Australia.

### **COMMENCEMENT OF QUEENSLAND PRACTICE**

A desire to see his mother brought Dods back home to Brisbane in 1894. This visit proved to be the turning-point in his career, for during his stay he entered for and subsequently won a competition for a new Nurses' Quarters at the Brisbane General Hospital. He returned to England via America the following year, but was only to stay a short while. He accepted an offer of partnership with a Brisbane architect, Mr. Francis Hall, and thus, with the Nurses' Quarters yet to be built, the practice of Hall and Dods was commenced.

The partnership proved to be a fruitful one. Francis Hall was primarily administrator and business man, so that the majority of the design work was left entirely in the hands of Dods. Commissions were not slow in coming in the growing city, and the firm soon established a good reputation in all fields of building.

Following on the Nurses' Quarters, the firm designed and supervised many more buildings for the Brisbane and South Coast Hospitals Board, and when the new Mater Misericordiae Hospital was to be built, Hall and Dods, as acknowledged hospital specialists, were commissioned to design it.

In 1904, Hall and Dods were appointed Diocesan Architects for the Brisbane Diocese of the Church of England. In this capacity, they were responsible for the Church Offices and St. John's School, adjoining the Cathedral, in Ann Street, Brisbane, the supervision of the building of the Cathedral itself (a very fine processional cross in the Cathedral is a memorial to the Cathedral's supervising architect, Robin Smith Dods), and the Archbishop's Chapel at Bishopsbourne. Commissions were undertaken for private chapels and churches, and these buildings must be included as some of Dods' best work.

The firm carried out quite a large number of projects for the Roman Catholic community. In addition to the large Mater Hospital group, some convent construction and conversion, the principal work was the Red Hill suburban Parish Church of St. Brigid's.

The design of houses showed Dods' architectural skill at its best, and the firm was commissioned to execute a large number of residential projects throughout the State.

Robin Dods had excellent personal qualifications as well

as technical ability. He possessed a ready wit, was an accomplished raconteur, and his natural charm made him a popular figure in business and club circles. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that the combination of Hall and Dods was responsible for a major portion of the important commercial work carried out in the city during the currency of their partnership.

### PRACTICE IN SYDNEY

Although he had been so busy and successful in Brisbane, Dods felt that his architectural future in this city was limited. His ambition made him anxious to break into the larger commercial work offering in the south. In 1913 he terminated his partnership with Francis Hall and went to Sydney to join the firm of Spain and Cosh.

Robin Dods had been a sick man for some years prior to his departure for Sydney, and his days were already numbered. He lived only another seven years, and he did not attain the recognition in Sydney that had been his in Brisbane.

Little is now known of Dods' architectural activity in Sydney. He built for himself a house at Edgecliff, described by a contemporary as "charming in its quiet Georgian character, well planned, and forming an attractive setting for the antique furniture he had collected for many years." The Newcastle Club, from the offices of Spain and Cosh, is certainly Dods' work, as it exhibits many features characteristic of his Queensland domestic architecture.

The largest known work in Sydney that was substantially of Dods' design was the South British Insurance Coy. Ltd. building, at the corner of O'Connell and Hunter Streets. This ten-storey building would be the largest commercial undertaking that Dods would have been engaged on in his whole career. There is little evidence of the architect's particular style, however, as the completed structure, although finely and correctly detailed, is just another essay in the classical Insurance House Architecture of its period.

The Sydney Art Circle knew Robin Dods well. He had always taken a keen interest in all forms of art, and was an enthusiastic and discriminating collector of paintings and furniture. He was a foundation member of the Sydney Arts and Crafts Society, and well-known artists were numbered amongst his numerous friends. So highly was Robin Dods regarded that Sir John Sulman, shortly before Dods' death, invited him to become a member of the selection committee of the National Art Gallery.

Robin Dods died on 23 July 1920, and was buried in the South Head Cemetery. At the age of 52, a busy and useful life was thus cut short, and a distinguished architect passed on, to leave in Queensland a legacy of outstanding achievement in the development of its architecture.

### INFLUENCES AND CONTEMPORARIES

Before proceeding with a more detailed study of Dods' architecture under sub-headings of building types, it is well to consider more carefully the architectural influences to which he was subjected abroad and the state of architectural development awaiting him in Queensland when he set up practice in 1896.

Dods had begun his career in a most critical and interesting period in the development of architecture, when the protagonists of the Modern Movement were beginning to influence architectural thought. Much of the training that Dods received in his employers' offices in Scotland and England would have been along Classical and Classical Revival lines, for this is reflected in his Gothic competition designs. He would have had little personal design freedom, however, for the Soane Medallion Design would have been calculated to impress the assessors, and the work in Sir Aston Webb's office would naturally reflect his employer's style.

Such a man as Robin Dods would be receptive to the advanced thought and ideas of his contemporaries in Scotland, and his early association with the Arts and Crafts Society would point to a keen interest in the modern movement. Although Charles Rennie MacIntosh in Glasgow was his contemporary, apart from the meeting in Italy in 1891, there is no evidence of any closer personal association. Dods made no great excursion into the realm of Art Nouveau, but in much of his work can be seen similarity to the work of MacIntosh. Dods' simple, bold use of timber may have been inspired by MacIntosh, as was the heart-shaped motif which was a much-used feature in Art Nouveau decoration. Dods' roof lantern, bay windows and the Georgian-type windows are similar to those used by MacIntosh, and the simple wrought iron work and the concrete cantilever balcony suggest the north facade of the Glasgow School of Arts.

The house that Robin Dods designed for his brother Espie at 97 Wickham Terrace, Brisbane, has a character distinctly similar to MacIntosh's "Hill House" at Helensburgh, designed in 1902. The rough-cast finish, a technique then

new to Brisbane, may have been inspired by this and similar Scottish work.

The tall-backed chair was a MacIntosh innovation, and probably influenced Dods' furniture design. Dods' chairs, though similar in character, are less graceful and possess little of his contemporary's decoration and form.

Dods had often expressed an admiration for the work of his great friend, Sir Robert Lorimer, stating that he had received much benefit working with him. The two friends spent much time together in their younger days, and in later years corresponded regularly.

In 1909, Dods and Lorimer travelled through Europe. It was on this trip that they visited Germany, and no doubt were very interested in the Deutscher Werkbund, which had been founded only two years before, and which had so much in common with the Arts and Crafts movement.

Lorimer's romantic Scottish Baronial architecture earned for him the title, "the J. M. Barrie of Architecture." There is little evidence of any of his style in Dods' buildings, but the one point which the two men had in common was their love of craftsmanship. Lorimer had worked in the offices of G. F. Bodley, the Gothic Revivalist, and from him had learned the value of building up a team of expert craftsmen. Dods adhered to this principle, and much of the success of his architecture was due to the fact that he had gathered about him skilled men who could translate his ideas so ably into solid form.

Lorimer laid emphasis on the moulding of the Scottish Vernacular to suit his purpose, and in this way may have influenced in principle Dods' similar handling of the local Queensland idiom.

An interesting comparison may be drawn between Lorimer's St. Peter's Church, Edinburgh, designed in 1907-8, and St. Brigid's, Red Hill, designed in 1912. The chancel arch and the woodwork ceiling over the sanctuary are very similar in both churches, as is the general character of the interiors. However, the Chapel of the Scottish National War Memorial, which was designed after World War I by Sir Robert, is strongly reminiscent of the chancel of St. Brigid's. The treatment of the arches between the buttresses is identical.

Norman Shaw, who already had a considerable reputation as an architect when Dods was a student, later became his friend. Shaw was an architect of great inventiveness, and he introduced many new motifs adapted from past styles into English architecture. Dods' work in face brick-

work and stone may have had its origin in the buildings of Shaw, for Shaw, as well as other architects of the modern movement, favoured these materials, and used them to good effect. Shaw's simplified "Brick Gothic" is echoed in Dods' St. John's School and Diocesan Offices.

### LOCAL INTERPRETATION

Whatever the influences, it cannot be said that Robin Dods copied the work of others. When he returned to Queensland he brought the first beginnings of the new movement to his native State, and developed his own particular style. He did not pioneer "Modern" architecture as it is known today but, like Voysey in England, he discarded styles and historical ornament (where possible) and in this way helped pave the way for the acceptance of modern architecture.

Queensland was not a wealthy State, and with few exceptions money was not made readily available for building projects, and more particularly for the employment of an architect. Few could afford, or cared, to spend money on housing other than to provide a reasonable shelter. Commercial interests displayed little enthusiasm for architecture.

A distinctive northern vernacular had been established with the timber house raised on stumps, and although the basic ideas were sound enough, the aesthetic handling of the subject was extremely poor.

The early, simple "Colonial" houses, built either of stone or timber, low on the ground and encompassed by verandahs, degenerated spiritually and lifted physically into the stilted boxes that in their thousands came to form Queensland's suburbia.

Timber formed the major building material for houses, but builder-designers made little attempt at any positive expression in fine timber detailing. The accent was on obtaining lining boards free from blemish rather than on the introduction of timber decoration. It was so much easier to apply the "Architecture" in the form of a filigree of cast iron balustrading between the verandah posts.

Dods, commenting on this degeneration of the house from its early colonial beginnings, wrote ". . . the road travelled since then is beset with quaint and inconsequent deceits, and the journey, though relieved here and there by some excellent work, leaves on the whole an impression of chaos."

The city buildings of the merchants and the bankers certainly were designed by such architects as chose to

practise in the struggling northern outposts, but little work of any merit was accomplished. Traditional styles were slavishly copied and, with the exception of a few buildings treated in a light Italian Renaissance manner — such as the Brisbane General Post Office — little attempt was made in designing to suit the climate.

It was to this architectural chaos that Robin Dods returned. Although he felt strongly against the work being done in his home town, he did not let his feelings produce criticism alone. Such was his training that he recognised the merits of the local vernacular and materials and, far from disowning them, set out to mould a new architecture from the old.

### DOMESTIC WORK

“A modern house is like matrimony in this, that it is most frequently assailed by those who have failed to attain it for themselves.”

Robin Dods achieved early recognition of his domestic work. His houses, when built, were soon noticed and admired. His clients were evidently people with means, since a great bulk of his Brisbane houses were in the wealthy suburbs of Clayfield and New Farm. There is also a Dods house in Charleville and another in Reynella, South Australia. In two known cases only did he design cottage-type houses. These were two groups of three, and evidently designed for clients who were investing in real estate.

Designing to suit the climate was a primary consideration with him. Planning suited the prevailing north-east breeze, and a generous area of wide verandah shaded the living and bedroom areas of his houses. His belief that an insulating layer of air over the house was essential gave rise to the characteristic high-pitched roof ventilated by gables and neat lanterns.

The vertical adjustable louvre, that now-familiar cliché of contemporary architecture, was introduced by Dods to control sun and breeze some forty years ago. They appeared on at least a section of the verandah and extended from the top of the hand-rail of the balustrade to the soffit of the bressumer. The blades were lozenge-shaped, pivoted top and bottom, and controlled by a central bar linking each blade.

To hide what he described as “an ugly forest of bare poles” under a house, Dods hid the stumps from view. This was achieved by sheeting the stumps in with boarding



matching the external sheeting of the house. The boarding, mitred on external angles, extended from the ground to the underside of the metal ant caps on top of the stumps and allowed a continuous ventilating strip some three inches wide all round between top of sheeting and bottom plate. Enclosing the stumps thus helped in appearance to tie the house to the ground and materially helped to offset what might have been an overpowering roof. The treatment is unique, and perhaps more than any other establishes positive identification of Dods' houses.

Dods showed his masterly handling of timber detail on verandahs and this gives much of the charm and appeal to his houses. Timber sections used were large but always in scale. Verandah posts usually finished 6 in. by 3 in. and top plates 12 in. by 3 in. Corner verandah posts were formed out of a 6 in. by 6 in. length of timber with a solid 3 in. by 3 in. section cut out to form the angle. Timber balusters were either plain rectangular in section or 1¼ in. by 1½ in. with a simple turned length towards the top of the baluster.

The general construction followed closely that of the conventional timber dwelling. It would seem that lack of finance prevented a better finish than the ubiquitous T. & G. V.J. wall sheeting internally, for a very few houses showed timber panelling or other enrichment. Fireplaces were neat and plain, with a simple facing of marble round the opening, surmounted by a bold timber mantel. The "tin" roof of the Queensland home was retained, but usually took the form of flat and roll, although corrugated iron was occasionally used. A slight bellcast at the eaves lighted the massive roof structure, and the open-boarded eave projecting some three feet beyond the wall was something that was not to be used generally until after World War II.

The architect's own home, at the corner of Sydney and Abbot Streets, New Farm, remains in much the same state as when it was occupied by its designer. All the characteristic features are there, the high roof, louvred verandah, weatherboard base. The front door has a heart-shaped cut-out, and this decoration, which invariably appears in some form or other on all of Dods' work, acts almost as his signature.

The house at Diane Street, Clayfield, now occupied by Dr. P. Earnshaw, is perhaps one of Dods' best. A few planning alterations have been made and colour schemes changed, but basically the house remains as designed.

A broad flight of steps, flanked by tall, elegant balusters,

leads up to a verandah which shows Dods' timber detailing at its best. Between the verandah posts a most delightful and rhythmic infill is attained by a flowing curved timber member. Each curve is formed by two pieces of 5 in. by 3 in. timber halved and bolted together at the top. A vertical infilling of open slats closely spaced between the shaped timber and the top plate completes this graceful feature.

The front fence is worthy of mention, as it echoes the same careful attention to detail that was lavished on the house. It is a picket fence with a difference, wherein Dods showed that, with a little thought, the cattle-proof barrier of the locals could be made decorative. The gate posts have tall, urn-like finials, and the small front gate was chosen to display a heart, cut out of the mid-rail.

### **COMMERCIAL WORK**

As with his domestic work, Dods' commercial architecture is easily recognised. Again wherever possible he attempted to design for the climate, and his best work shows spacious planning and good ventilation. Soaring real estate values have made much of his planning now seem wasteful, but in any evaluation of his work it must be remembered that he worked in a comparatively small city whose commercial expansion has exceeded even the dreams of the then most visionary businessmen.

Even in Brisbane, commercial buildings have a transitory life, so that of the many buildings designed by the architect a number of them have been demolished, added to, or altered out of all recognition. By and large, Dods' commercial work was not inspiring, but several of his buildings were significant, advanced for their time, and well worthy of further study.

### **SUN INSURANCE BUILDING, EAGLE STREET, BRISBANE**

The Sun Insurance Company purchased this property in 1928 from Parbury Estates, who were the original owners. Apart from slight alterations, which mainly involved partitions and counters, the building has suffered little change.

The facade is handsome, well proportioned and, without stretching the similarity too far, may be compared with the facade of Inigo Jones' Banqueting House in Whitehall. It is most certainly the best of Dods' classical buildings and it seems a pity that traditional materials could not have

been used. Classical detail always suffers in appearance when executed in dull concrete, and the painting of the base with brown paint is a poor substitute for marble or granite.

Large casement windows with fanlights provide good natural lighting, and on the upper storey, overlooking Eagle Street, doors open out from the offices on to small balconies. Queensland flora decorates the capitals of the Ionic columns and the medallion bearing the date on the surmounting balustrade. Wherever Dods used classical decoration, the acanthus leaves of antiquity were replaced by fruit or leaves of native plants.

The barrel-vaulted ceiling to the entrance vestibule and the polished timber panelled dado of the vestibule are familiar, as are the tongue and grooved V-jointed ceiling to the offices.

It would seem that the owners wanted their money to show in external appearance, for the general finishes inside the building are not in keeping with what is expected of well-appointed chambers.

### **NEW ZEALAND INSURANCE COMPANY BUILDING, QUEEN STREET**

With the commission from the New Zealand Insurance Company to design their new premises came Dods' first chance to design a major building project in the city's main street. The opportunity was not wasted, for the design produced was original and, particularly for an insurance company's premises, revolutionary. The sketches were accepted by the Directors with the proviso that the entrance be re-designed, as evidently they felt that they could not pass a design completely devoid of the traditional forms that are always associated with insurance offices and banks. Against the architect's wishes, they insisted on the arched entrance with its heavy rusticated stone, keystone and vousoirs. Undoubtedly they considered this would reflect the financial stability of the company.

Unhampered by classical restrictions, Dods produced a free, graceful building that reflects much of the originality and freedom expressed in his domestic work. When built, the offices were free standing, as the surrounding buildings were only of one or two storeys. This gave the opportunity to consider all elevations, and it is one of the few Brisbane buildings whose architecture is not only a matter of the main facade alone. The Union Bank premises, however, were erected soon after the small insurance offices were completed, so that one elevation was thus lost to view.

The materials used — brickwork and stone, with copper rainwater accessories — were much favoured by Dods, and his best work was produced in this media. In fact, when he later went to Sydney he deplored the fact that he could not interest his clients in this form of construction. Much of the intimate domestic scale is achieved by the brickwork with its four-course-wide sandstone bands, and it is a pity that the heavy beehive entrance was thrust on the designer. Perhaps Dods was willing to compromise, and considered himself lucky to have achieved so much without opposition, for usually he was particularly stubborn and insisted on having his own way if his architecture was in danger.

An early sketch of the proposed building shows the roof without the lantern. The addition of this fine-detailed feature probably came as a fortunate afterthought. The small cantilevered concrete balconies on the Queen Street facade are enclosed by iron balustrading, heavier and more detailed than was usual, but they are nevertheless simple and pleasant. The rainwater heads, the guttering and downpipe straps all received their share of attention. The heads have an interesting shape, the guttering ornamented by heart-shaped leaves and the downpipe straps embossed with the company's initials, "N.Z.I.," a motif repeated elsewhere throughout the Insurance Chambers.

From the main entrance a passage fourteen feet wide leads to the main insurance offices at the rear of the building. Surprisingly, this rear portion is only two storeys high, whilst the main mass of the building is five. The wide corridor repeats on all floors, and is deplored by the present directors of the company as a waste of rentable space.

The two-storey high insurance chamber, with its tall columns and ornamented ceiling, was a feature of the building, but in 1920 the company decided that such volume in one room was uneconomical, and a new floor was built on a level with the mezzanine balcony.

Excellent cross-ventilation was maintained in the main chamber by having wide doors opening out in the now familiar manner on to a balcony four feet wide overlooking the rear light area.

The main entrance corridor is paved with white marble tiles with a border of black tiles, and the walls of the corridor are tiled with a 9 in. by 9 in. dark green vitreous ceramic tile. These latter were imported from Italy, and the architect had special tiles made incorporating the "N.Z.I." motif that he specially designed. Dods later told

the company's manager that he designed this motif on the back of a menu in a cafe in Dresden, Germany, in 1906.

The iron hitching posts outside the front entrance at the kerb of the footpath are as decorative as they were practical in the horse and buggy era of bygone days. The lions decorating the tops of the posts, finely cast, were modelled from sketches that Robin Dods made of Landseer's famous lions in Trafalgar Square, London.

### **THE E.S.C.A. BUILDING, EDWARD STREET**

The most remarkable thing about this building is the fact that its design was "sold" to the company's directors. A building in Brisbane in 1915 without heavy cornices, string courses and applied classical ornament, was not only something new, but something the like of which was not again attempted until very recent years. The external expression of the structure, with the infilling of glazing and copper panels, probably had as its inspiration the work of American architects, who about that period were using a similar technique in skyscraper construction.

### **HOSPITALS**

Dods' hospital design echoes his domestic characteristics with the use of wide verandahs, maximum ventilation to room and wards, steeply pitched roofs, and a fine handling of timber detail.

He created Australian hospital history with his open-air wards, which are still being used for male patients. Each building simply consisted of a concrete floor with a perimeter of posts supporting a galvanised iron roof. The ceilings were boarded, and the whole building was closed to inclement weather by means of canvas screens on rollers fitted between the posts. The buildings still retain their open-air character, although the canvas blinds in the largest ward have been replaced by horizontal glass louvres and panels of asbestos cement.

### **ECCLESIASTICAL WORK**

There appears to be no aspect of architectural design to which Dods could not turn his talents with very good results, for some of his best work is to be seen in his churches and chapels. He was neither a revivalist nor a copyist, but his ecclesiastical work combined the traditional with his own peculiar style in the happy blend which produced graceful, simple buildings.

Although the partners were appointed architects to the

Brisbane Archdiocese of the Church of England, a great portion of their ecclesiastical work came from the Roman Catholic Church, from private persons and from country town church committees.

### **ST. JOHN'S INSTITUTE AND DIOCESAN OFFICES**

These two buildings stand in the grounds of the Cathedral Church of St. John the Evangelist and are an important part of the Cathedral group. St. John's Institute was built in 1905 and the offices five years later.

The Institute was designed as a school and was used as such by the Sisters of the Sacred Advent until 1941. Eulogistic references in the church papers of 1904 describe the school as being "the most modern in Queensland." In architectural treatment it is the most Gothic of any of Dods' church buildings, but the traditional detailing is limited to simple tracery and the lancet windows. The rather extensive use of stonework in this building was probably a result of the condition that stone was to be re-used from the demolished pro-cathedral which once stood in Queen's Park, George Street.

Reinforced concrete is used for stairs and landings, and the use of "triangle-shaped" blocks under each stair tread against the brickwork is unusual. Concrete lintels and mullions are used in the windows overlooking the playground and, rather inconsistently, the concrete of the mullions only is faced with stone. The Dods' cantilever balcony, with its plain iron balustrading, connects classrooms on the first floor and gives access to the playground by concrete steps. The heart motif is a prominent feature of the ironwork and the leadlight windows on the Ann Street facade.

The Diocesan Offices were originally designed to include a hall, but only the office section was built. The addition of the hall would have extended the building quite close to the school and would have helped to knit the group together. The complete design is indeed a fine one, and the drawings were "hung on the line" at the Royal Academy Exhibition at London in 1910. The English professional journals accorded the design warm praise; the drawings of a country church at Laidley and the New Zealand Company's building were also exhibited. The perspective of the Diocesan Office was most ably delineated by a Mr. G. K. Grounds, and the original is in the possession of the School of Architecture, University of Queensland.

The general character of the school is echoed in the

offices, but there is a noticeable difference in the handling of the Gothic idiom. Dods reverted to his brickwork relieved by stone courses, and in consequence the detail has been simplified.

### **SUPERVISION OF CONSTRUCTION OF ST. JOHN'S CATHEDRAL**

No one could have been more fitted to carry out this task than Robin Dods, for much of his earlier training would have given him a good grounding in the intricacies of Gothic stonework.

As there were few tradesmen available who were familiar with this type of work, the job of first educating the artisans fell to Dods, and in itself this was a considerable undertaking.

A coloured sketch exists in the Diocesan Offices of this building.

A very handsomely-worked silver processional cross was given to the Cathedral by Mrs. Mary Dods, in memory of her husband, and it was made in England to a design by Sir William Tupper, an English architect who was a friend of the Dods family. The cross now stands in the chancel of the Cathedral and is inscribed thus:

"To the Glory of God and in grateful memory of Robert\* S. Dods, A.R.I.B.A., under whose supervision the first part of this Cathedral Church of St. John the Evangelist, Brisbane, was built in 1907-11."

### **THE CHAPEL, "BISHOPSBOURNE"**

With this Chapel alone, Robin Dods' reputation as an architect would have been secured. He created a masterpiece with a small building, which is ruggedly simple and in complete harmony with the fine, dignified old building which it adjoins.

There has been no attempt made in this building at ostentatious decoration. Even the limonite facing to the stone has been allowed to remain, and these patches of reddish-brown give colour and texture to the buff coloured stone and enliven the brown-stained timber work. Nowhere else in Dods' work have simple materials been so expertly and adequately expressed. Indeed, the whole Chapel is an object lesson, demonstrating that character and atmosphere can be obtained in a building which is devoid of elaborate construction and finish, and unadorned by rich trappings.

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\*Robert S. Dods is correct, but the architect preferred the Christian name of Robin, and as Robin Dods he is always known.

## ST. BRIGID'S CHURCH, RED HILL

Some members of the Roman Catholic clergy regard St. Brigid's Church as the best parish church in Australia, and in this opinion they could not be far wrong. Few parishes would possess a more magnificent site and few can boast a church which is a major work of a very distinguished and competent architect.

At a meeting with the church committee, Dods was illustrating a talk on ecclesiastical design with photographs which he had taken of cathedrals and churches whilst on his latest trip abroad. The committee members were particularly interested in the great cathedral at Albi, in southern France, and accordingly they commissioned Dods to design a "Church like Albi." It was a considerable task to produce a parish church looking like one of the largest cathedrals in France, but the problem was solved.

The plan of the church is perfectly simple. There is a rectangular nave 117 ft. 6 in. long and 45 ft. 6 in. wide, and a small polygonal chancel. The priests' vestries are adjacent to the chancel on the west side, and two small buttressed extensions of the nave flank the main entrance in the north wall. The western extension houses a concrete stairway up to the choir gallery over the northern end of the nave, and the other is the baptistry. The sloping site allows for the accommodation of school rooms under the reinforced concrete floor of the nave, chancel and vestries.

The nave is divided into eight bays by piers 2 ft. 3 in. wide and 9 in. deep, and is separated from the chancel by a semi-circular chancel arch. The heavy trusses supporting the roof are of an unusual queen-post type with a curved bracket "supporting" the queen-post off the walls. A heavy binder running the full length of the church ties the bottom chord of the trusses at the queen-posts. All trusses are sheathed with timber panelling, whilst the queen-posts extend beneath the tie beams in heavy carved bosses. The chancel ceiling is deeply coffered in timber. The balcony fascia and soffit of the gallery is panelled. L. J. Harvey was employed and executed all of the carved timber work in the trusses and on the sounding board over the pulpit.

The brick walls of the church are 1 ft. 6 in. thick, those of the nave being 44 ft. high above the floor. Externally they are buttressed at 13 ft. 7 in. centres with buttresses 5 ft. 3 in. wide at base, diminishing in two steps to 2 ft. 3 in. wide at the top. The graceful repetition of the arches between the buttress not only ties them together structurally



and visually, but they frame the long, narrow, semi-circular headed windows lighting the nave.

### DIRECTNESS AND SIMPLICITY

The interior of the church possesses a directness and simplicity that is achieved by the bold handling of plain brickwork and massive timber, and the lofty proportions of the nave and the tall slit-like windows give ecclesiastical character and atmosphere. The chancel or sanctuary has sometimes been criticised for its absence of decoration, which may be justified, since some enrichment in the sanctuary might have made a foil to the dull mass of brickwork elsewhere. The high altar, which is of marble, is not very good, and was installed in the sanctuary against the architect's advice. Dods designed only the small and very simple side altars and the marble rail separating the nave from the chancel.

There are few places in and around Brisbane's suburbs from which St. Brigid's cannot be seen. The church rises majestically from the living rock of the hill, and its soaring verticality is emphasised by its position and site. All elevations are well handled, and although the character of Albi has been captured, there has been no blatant plagiarism. The scale of St. Brigid's is excellent, and on this point he could so easily have fallen into error. Dods created his own church in his own style.

### FURNITURE

It has been said that Robin Dods' first interest in architecture was awakened by the contemplation of a Jacobean chest. Be this as it may, but from early days he fostered a love for good furniture. Mr. A. E. Brooks, commenting on this, wrote: "He was an enthusiast in craftsmanship, and took an active part in the Art Workers' Guild and in the Arts and Crafts Society. When the latter body staged its first exhibition in the New Gallery, Regent Street, London, Mr. Dods was a prolific exhibitor. He was an authority on the great collection at South Kensington, and for all his useful, busy life he was an untiring collector of furniture and craft work of every sort. His love of technical excellence did much to raise the standards of the allied crafts of the joiner and the plasterer in Queensland. He was never too busy to help an aspiring student or an artisan who wished to improve the quality of his craft." The amount of splendid work he did in that direction will

never be known, but for Queensland it was distinctly a national asset.

### EPILOGUE

The Dods type of house did not long survive. It is true that many of his features became clichés and were hacked around by builder-designers, but his ideas on ventilation and aspect were little heeded, so that by and large the general housing standard was little improved. Succeeding architects were not ready to follow his example but rather indulged in an orgy of “styles,” with the result that houses of the wealthy became bogus Spanish Mansions, Mexican Haciendas and Tudor Mansions, according to fashion. Queensland entered into a period relieved by precious few buildings of any real architectural significance, which was to last from Dods’ departure until another generation of architects, with sounder technical training, demonstrated to the post-World War II world the benefits of design for climate and simplicity.

Unfortunately, many of Dods’ houses have undergone considerable alteration. The acute housing shortage that existed in Brisbane after 1945 made the large home much sought after for conversion into serviced rooms, flats and convalescent homes, and many houses suffered in this connection. The spacious open verandahs have been closed in with ugly casements, and the large airy rooms subdivided to provide the maximum of accommodation. Queenslanders seem to have a passion for closing themselves in, and even in many cases where the houses are still preserved, all manner of blinds and infilling are used to defeat the purposes that Dods intended.

Most of the commercial buildings remain substantially the same as they were when constructed, but as many of them are only two-storeyed, their life in a rapidly-expanding city must necessarily be limited. Several have been completely altered and, as in the case of Rhoades Building, have gained a new identity.

Dods’ churches alone remain virtually unspoiled. It is fortunate that church authorities are little inclined to “improve” their buildings, and as they were so they remain.

After Robin Dods left for Sydney, his former partner, Francis Hall, continued on in practice in Brisbane with new associates. Mr. A. E. Brooks, F.R.A.I.A., who joined the firm of Hall and Dods as a young architect pupil, continued on under Francis Hall, and much of the work he produced reflects the influence of Robin Dods’ teaching and example.