



Tom Roberts

(courtesy Geraldton Historical Society)

Thomas Roberts (c.1880-1947) may have been born 6 April 1880, at Ballarat, Victoria. Little is currently known of his early years, other than that Roberts' war service records indicate that he served three years articles with the architect F.W. Turton at Ballarat. As a young man, Roberts moved to Western Australia by at least February 1904, possibly somewhat earlier, as he drew plans for George Sharp of a proposed hotel in Burt Street, Boulder that were presented to the licensing court for approval of a provisional licence in March 1904.

By the early twentieth century, infrastructure in Kalgoorlie-Boulder had already experienced significant development resultant from the 1890s boom times, and fewer opportunities were available to the architects remaining in the area. None-the-less Roberts managed to gradually establish himself in the goldfields. In April 1905 Roberts called tenders for a brick hotel at the corner of Mafeking & Plumer Streets, Williamstown, Kalgoorlie for James Burke, and the building remains in place today. A Wesleyan, Roberts married May James at the Queen's Church on Piesse Street, Boulder in 1906. Mr W. Roberts was best man, and Mr L. Roberts was groomsman at the wedding, perhaps indicating that Roberts had brothers who had also moved to the West from Victoria.

Tom Roberts was closely involved with the development of the Kalgoorlie Town Hall and Council Chambers at the corner of Hannan and Wilson Streets, a building that had a very uncertain beginning. The subject of a controversial competition, tenders were first called for the proposed town hall in July 1907. The lowest tender exceeded the limit for the project, and plans were deferred. Roberts approached the council with an offer to have the building completed for

£12 500, the stipulated limit, according to the plans he sent as his competition design. However the Council suggested that the town surveyor, Charles Wordsworth James, should be entrusted with the task of preparing new plans. James then engaged Roberts as his assistant, and proceeded with the preparation of reduced plans for the town hall. Economic considerations weighed heavily on the design of the building, and for this reason there was far less embellishment than originally envisaged. Tom gained further employment when he was appointed as clerk of works for the construction.

In 1908 Roberts designed St John's Anglican Church (later St John the Baptist Old Cathedral) in Maritana Street, Kalgoorlie and it was completed in 1909. Illustrating the architect's versatility, in June 1909 the *Kalgoorlie Miner* carried a glowing description of a Tom Roberts-designed roller skating rink and facilities at *The Stadium*, 'a spacious and splendidly appointed enclosure' at the 'top end' of Hannan Street, between Porter Street and the lane next to the Duke of Cornwall Hotel. Roberts' plans included tea, kiosk and refreshment rooms at the northern side of the enclosure, and were 'efficiently carried out by the contractors'. In late 1909 Roberts' office was located in a residential area, at 25 Graeme Street, Kalgoorlie.

Perhaps acknowledging that architectural work at Kalgoorlie was becoming difficult to procure, Roberts transferred from the goldfields to the prosperous port town of Geraldton in 1910, where he appears to have initially taken on the licence of the Commonwealth Hotel. Resuming practice as an architect in late 1911, perhaps with encouragement from family and associates, Tom opened an office in Durlacher Street. In January 1912 Roberts advertised tenders for a brick residence in Gregory Street, Geraldton for J. James, probably for his father-in-law Jim James. By March 1912 he had also completed drawings for a new homestead at Glengarry for J.G. (Jack) Grant.

Prior to the First World War, Roberts advised on plans to modernise Marine Terrace and was the architect for the Globe Brewery, being responsible for alterations to their hotels. Enlisting for war service in February 1916, Roberts left his wife at their Gregory Street, Geraldton residence to join with the Australian Imperial Forces, embarking from Fremantle on *HMAT Uganda* in September. Fortunately he survived the horrors of the 'Great War', albeit with

injuries, returning to Australia in July 1919. Upon return to Geraldton he resumed practice, and following the move of Harry Marwood to Perth in the early 1920s, Roberts remained the only architect in Geraldton, notwithstanding the Mullewa architect-priest John Hawes was designing church-related buildings for the Bishop of Geraldton. After the *Architects Act of Western Australia 1921* received formal assent, Roberts eventually registered with the Architects Board under the *Architects Act Amendment Act 1923*, Section 3, indicating that initially his qualifications may not have been recognised.

Involved with plans for a new racecourse in 1924, Tom Roberts was a committee member of the Victoria District Turf Club. New premises designed by Roberts in 1924 included two shops and a factory in Marine Terrace for the *Geraldton Guardian* newspaper. His flexibility was demonstrated by the design of a shearing shed at Tibradden Station in 1925. The reduced economic activity resultant from the Great Depression does not appear to have impacted greatly with Roberts work in the 1930s, and he had a steady stream of varied projects in the Mid-West Region. A prominent member of the Geraldton Golf Club, design of the course layout and new club house in 1932 was a project that would have been of great importance to Roberts.

In 1933 Roberts designed a new shop for Mr. E. Snell, with a frontage to Marine Terrace, Geraldton. The shop fronts were constructed of West Australian jarrah and Queensland maple, with curved glass entrances, the contract price for the project being £2,143. The building still exists, in modified form, at 100 Marine Terrace. The Druid's Hall built in 1934 at 65 Durlacher Street, corner of Sandford Street, Geraldton is an illustration of Roberts' adoption of Inter-War design trends. A municipal representative on the Geraldton Sailors and Soldiers' Memorial Institute Trust, Roberts designed Birdwood House on Chapman Road, built in 1935. Birdwood House is described as being in the Inter-War Free Classical style, with elements of art deco.

Roberts appears to have been busy with work up until the outbreak of the Second World War, but was noted to have been suffering from his Great War injuries. Tom died 2 February 1947 at Hollywood Hospital, Nedlands aged 66 years, and was buried at the nearby Karrakatta Cemetery. May Roberts died at Busselton in 1963, and was buried with her husband.

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- 'Tenders', *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 13 April 1905, p.6 (hotel cnr Mafeking & Plumer Sts, Williamstown).
- 'Proposed Cremorne Gardens Kalgoorlie', *Kalgoorlie Western Argus*, 11 September 1906, p.17.
- 'Large Wedding', *Daily News*, 29 September 1906, p.7.
- 'Cremorne Theatre and Gardens', *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 16 January 1907, p.6.
- 'Tenders', *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 8 June 1907, p.10 (brick shop Menzies, Montgomery Bros drapers).
- 'The Proposed Town Hall', *Kalgoorlie Western Argus*, 9 July 1907, p.16.
- 'The Kalgoorlie Town Hall', *Kalgoorlie Western Argus*, 3 September 1907, p.12.
- 'Kalgoorlie Town Hall', *Kalgoorlie Western Argus*, 12 November 1907, p.12.
- 'Private Engagements', *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 14 January 1908, p.4 (clerk of works to Town Hall).
- 'Description of the Building', *Kalgoorlie Western Argus*, 23 February 1909, p.28 (St John's).
- 'Stadium for Kalgoorlie', *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 28 April 1909, p.4.
- 'A Superior Skating Rink', *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 3 June 1909, p.8.
- 'Personal Items', *Geraldton Guardian*, 13 August 1910, p.3 (move Kalgoorlie to Geraldton).
- 'Personal Items', *Geraldton Guardian*, 23 November 1911, p.2 (changing from licensee of Commonwealth Hotel to practicing as architect again).
- 'Tenders', *Geraldton Guardian*, 18 January 1912, p.2 (Gregory Street residence for J. James).
- 'Building Contract', *Geraldton Guardian*, 12 March 1912, p.2 (residence Glengarry, J.G. Grant).
- 'Concrete Blocks', *Geraldton Guardian*, 25 April 1912, p.2 (Glengarry - sand from creek).
- 'Miners' Arms Hotel', 'Miners' Arms Hotel', 23 May 1912, p.2 (additions to hotel).
- 'Tenders', *Geraldton Guardian*, 29 March 1913, p.3 (brick hall, Upper Chapman Roads Board).
- 'Personal Items', *Geraldton Guardian*, 11 November 1913 (horse accident on way to Yetna).
- 'More business premises', *Geraldton Guardian*, 16 May 1914, p.2 (supervising in Geraldton for new Marine Terrace shops and coffee palace building designed by Oldham & Cox).
- 'Northampton Notes', *Geraldton Guardian*, 10 August 1915, p.1 (National Bank, Northampton).
- 'Personal Items', *Geraldton Guardian*, 19 February 1916, p.2 (enlisting for war service).
- 'Drowning Accident at Bairnsdale', *Gippsland Mercury*, 29 February 1916, p.3 (F.W. Turton).
- 'Guardian Buildings', *Geraldton Guardian*, 4 March 1924, p.1 (2 shops, factory, Marine Terrace).
- 'Important buildings', *The West Australian*, 24 March 1924, p.5 (Geraldton Guardian).
- 'Victoria District Turf Club', *Geraldton Guardian*, 6 September 1924, p.3 (new racecourse).
- 'Tenders', *Geraldton Guardian*, 2 May 1925, p.3 (shearing shed at Tibbradden Station).
- 'Mullewa Road Board', *Geraldton Guardian*, 22 March 1928, p.4 (Mullewa town hall).
- 'Tenders', *Geraldton Guardian and Express*, 11 June 1929, p.3 (telephone service to Tibbradden Station for Atkins Bros).
- 'The Late Dr E.S. Bieler', *Geraldton Guardian and Express*, 2 October 1930, p.1 (memorial in Presbyterian section at 'old cemetery on Eastern Road').
- 'The Late Dr E.S. Bieler', *Geraldton Guardian and Express*, 30 October 1930, p.1 (inscription).
- 'Ambulance Association', *Geraldton Guardian and Express*, 9 December 1930, p.2 (Honorary Architect).

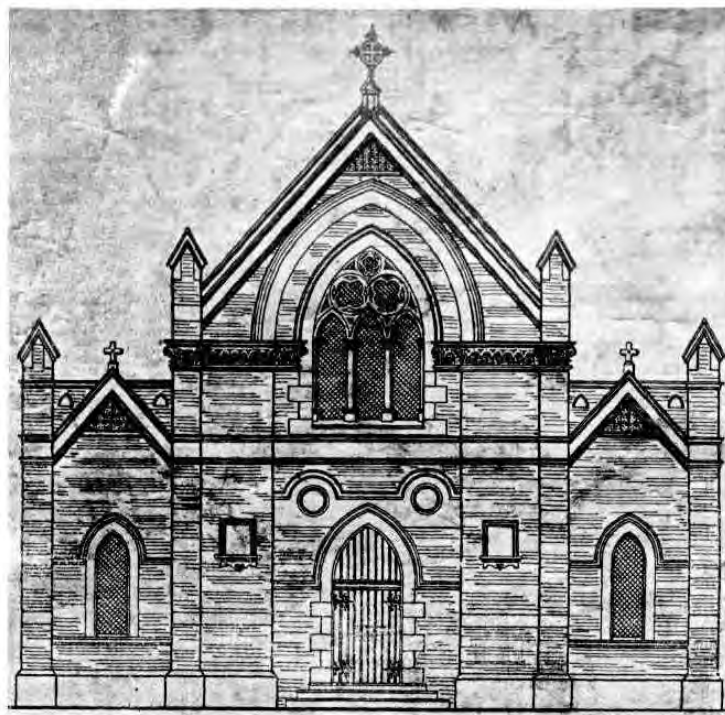
'To Builders', *Geraldton Guardian and Express*, 23 January 1932, p.2 (Geraldton Golf Club).
'Geraldton Golf Club', *Geraldton Guardian and Express*, 30 April 1932, p.3 (new facilities).
'Snell's New Geraldton Shop', *Geraldton Guardian and Express*, 30 May 1933, p.4.
'AMP Society', *Geraldton Guardian and Express*, 26 October 1933, p.5 (district office).
'Successful Tenderers', *Geraldton Guardian and Express*, 2 December 1933, p.2 (13 shops, cottages etc for Perpetual Trustees and Agency Co., trustees of the Baston Estate).
'Recreation Ground Grandstand', *Geraldton Guardian and Express*, 26 May 1934, p.2.
'Birdwood House', *Geraldton Guardian and Express*, 3 September 1935, p.3 (description).
'To Builders', *Geraldton Guardian and Express*, 12 August 1937, p.2 (Globe brewery Evans St.).
'Grandstand Erection', *Geraldton Guardian and Express*, 1 February 1938, p.4.
'Business Enterprise', *Geraldton Guardian and Express*, 7 March 1939, p.3 (Young Motors Ltd garage owned by D.E. Grant of Moonyoonooka).
'Obituary - Late Mr Tom Roberts', *Geraldton Guardian and Express*, 4 February 1947, p.1.
Great War service, ROBERTS Thomas, NAA series no B2455, item Barcode 8035449.

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ST. JOHN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH, KALGOORLIE, NOW IN COURSE OF ERECTION IN MARITANA-STREET - FRONT ELEVATION. ARCHITECT, T. ROBERTS; CONTRACTORS, WILLIAMS, O'DONNELL & CO.

Roberts' drawing of the front elevation of St John's Anglican Church, Maritana Street, Kalgoorlie
(*Kalgoorlie Western Argus*, 17 November 1908, p.19)



St John's Anglican Church, Maritana Street, Kalgoorlie (*Western Mail*, 1 May 1909, p.27)

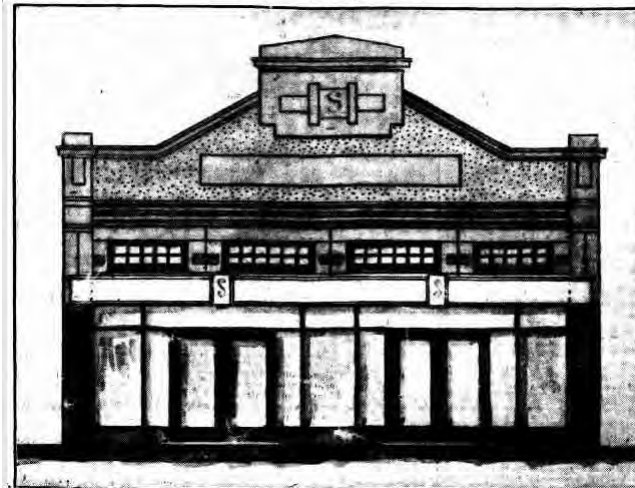


Kalgoorlie Town Hall & Council Chambers of 1908 (HCWA Pic3075)



Glengarry homestead built in 1912 for Jack Grant with Shephard's Buick in the foreground, 1927 (courtesy Faye Smart, *Conservation Plan for Glengarry Homesteads (1852) & (1912)*, John Taylor Architect, 2004, p.41)

Frontage View of Snell's New Geraldton Shop



Snell's Shop, Marine Terrace Geraldton (*Geraldton Guardian and Express*, 30 May 1933, p.4)



Druid's Hall, 65 Durlacher Street, cnr Sandford Street, Geraldton of 1934 (John Taylor 2003)



Birdwood House, Chapman Road, Geraldton of 1935 (*Geraldton Guardian and Express*, 3 September 1935, p.3)