



William Robertson

(Battye, J.S., *Cyclopedia of Western Australia*, Vol.1, 1912, p.634)

William Edward Robertson (1863-1929) was born 25 August 1863 in Melbourne, son of Dr James Robertson, who had trained at Glasgow University before migrating to Australia in 1854. William received his educational training at the Toorak and Scotch Colleges of Melbourne, and subsequently was articled to A.E. Johnston, of the firm of Smith & Johnston Architects, Melbourne. Having served a term of four years with this business Robertson went abroad for a couple of years and 'studied the prevailing forms of architecture on the European Continent, in England, and America'.

Returning to Melbourne in 1888, Robertson became an Associate of the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects (RVIA) in April 1888. In the same month he was admitted to a partnership with George Charles Inskip (1840-1931), and during the five years that this joint venture existed, the firm was responsible for some important works. Conspicuous among these were many country branches of the Union Bank, the National Bank at Kew, and a residence for solicitor-speculator-politician Sir Matthew Davies, erected at a cost of £12,000, which 'took its place among the finest structures in Victoria'. The firm also designed the Union Bank completed in 1889 on the corner of High and Cliff Streets, Fremantle, Western Australia.

Robertson practiced with Inskip in Victoria up until c.1893, when business conditions were extremely difficult, due to recession, and in November 1894 he ceased to be a member of the RVIA. As was the case with many Melbourne architects, Robertson eventually fled depressed economic conditions of the 1890s, migrating to gold-boom Western Australia in search of work. He is listed

in WA goldfields towns as an architect within *Wises Directory* of 1897-1898 at Kurawa (Broad Arrow), in 1899-1900 at Broad Arrow, perhaps in 1901 (as J.H. Robertson?) at Mt Malcolm, and 1902-1903 at Laverton, where he was kept busy with the designs and erection of hotels and commercial premises.

Robertson is credited in a number of sources with the Commercial Bank of Australia built in 1901 on the corner of High and Mouatt Streets in Fremantle, but this is in fact an Oldham & Eales design. He married Elsie Jane Paltridge at Mount Morgan (south of Kalgoorlie) in 1901 and the couple had two daughters, in 1902 Theodora whose birthplace was registered as Laverton, and in 1903 Margaret whose birthplace was registered as the Perth suburb of Cottesloe. Thus it is possible that the family moved to metropolitan Perth in 1903, perhaps after Robertson completed work on the State Hotel at Gwalia (adjacent to Leonora), opened on 3 June 1903. Robertson may have taken leave or worked within other practices for a period following this project, as in 1904-1905 he is not listed in *Wises Directory*, although in August 1904 he called tenders for a residence in Cottesloe from the Perth office of E.E. Giles (1865-1936).

Robertson completed numerous shops, offices, warehouses, and residences in the Perth metropolitan area during the period 1906-1928. William is again listed on his own account for 1906-1907 in practice at Hamburg Chambers, Hay Street Perth; for 1908-1923 located at the New Zealand Chambers, 105 St George's Terrace, Perth; and for 1924-1928 at 23 Fourth Avenue, Mount Lawley. In 1912 Robertson noted that the Perth Roller Flour Mills (PRFM) were 'amongst the structures placed to his credit', but the main PRFM building of 1905 at Love Lane (off Wellington Street), Perth appears to have been designed through architects Hobbs, Smith & Forbes office, with Robertson then completing a number of other projects at the Wellington Street and adjacent West Perth sites for PRFM in following years.

The *Architects Act of Western Australia 1921* received formal assent in 1922, and Robertson registered (no.71) with the Architects Board of WA in August of that year. In his final years, Robertson lived at 'Amiens', Suburban (Mill Point) Road, South Perth. William may have retired at 65 years of age in August 1928, as he is not listed in the 1929 *Wises Directory*. He died at South Perth 25 July 1929, and was buried in the Anglican section at Karrakatta Cemetery.

References:

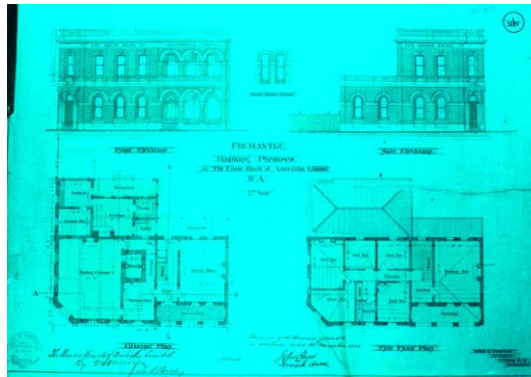
- 'Partnership Notice', *Argus*, 16 April 1888, p.11 (Inskip & Robertson partnership).
- 'Victorian Institute of Architects', *Argus*, 17 April 1888, p.8 (elected ARVIA).
- 'Tenders', *Argus*, 2 May 1890, p.10 (large country residence at Bayswater for Sir M.H. Davies; may have been *Invermay* later known as *Doongalla* at The Basin, destroyed 1932 by bushfire).
- 'Tenders', *Argus*, 6 December 1890, p.15 (shops and National Bank Kew, stabling Kirkella Station near Stawell for D. McKellar).
- 'Tenders', *Argus*, 11 February 1892, p.3 (large residence Toorak for James Robertson).
- 'Death of Dr James Robertson', *Argus*, 23 January 1893, p.6 (father's death).
- 'Broad Arrow', *Kalgoorlie Western Argus*, 18 February 1897, p.13 (Broad Arrow Brewery).
- 'Tenders', *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 6 January 1903, p.6 (hotel Sons of Gwalia Gold Mine, Leonora).
- 'Gwalia State Hotel', *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 4 June 1903, p.5 (opening of State Hotel at Gwalia).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 10 August 1904, p.2 (residence Cottesloe - EE Giles office).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 14 February 1905, p.5 (flour mill, grain store etc at Love Lane, Perth by Hobbs Smith & Forbes).
- 'Perth Roller Flour Mills', *Western Mail*, 19 August 1905, pp.25, 44 (photo, description, opening).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 28 January 1907, p.5 (residence Heytesbury Road Subiaco for A.G. Unmack).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 4 April 1908, p.9 (large brick and stone residence Chelmsford Road, North Perth).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 22 October 1910, p.8 (large warehouse and offices for Perth Roller Flour Mills).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 12 November 1910, p.3 (iron foot bridge for Perth Roller Flour Mills).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 23 January 1911, p.2 (residence Mount Lawley for A. Randell).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 29 August 1911, p.3 (flour mills and offices, West Perth; flour & wheat stores, for Perth Roller Flour Mills).
- 'William Edward Robertson', Battye, J.S., *Cyclopedia of Western Australia*, Vol. 1, 1912, p.634.
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 8 September 1913, p.3 (two-storey flour store for Perth Roller Flour Mills Dyer Street, West Perth).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 5 September 1917, p.3 (flour store West Perth for Perth Roller Flour Mills).
- 'Robertson', *The West Australian*, 26 July 1929, p.1 (funeral details and home address).

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Heritage Committee meeting approval date: 10 April 2014 Last updated: 10 April 2014

Citation details:

Taylor, Dr John J., 'William Edward Robertson (1863-1929)', *Western Australian Architect Biographies*, <http://www.architecture.com.au/> accessed DATE.



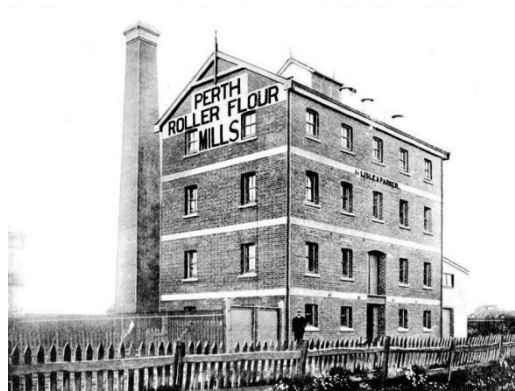
One of Inskip & Robertson's drawings for the Union Bank built in 1889 on the corner of High and Cliff Streets, Fremantle (Muhling Collection)



Union Bank of 1889 on the corner of High and Cliff Streets, Fremantle (John Taylor, July 2008)



State Hotel at Gwalia of 1903 (Wikipedia).



Given later works for the same client, one could speculate that W.E. Robertson worked on the Perth Roller Flour Mills building of 1905 at Love Lane - off Wellington Street, Perth - whilst working in the office of Hobbs, Smith & Forbes (*Western Mail*, 19 August 1905, p.25).