



Robert McMaster

(*Western Mail*, 25 December 1904, p.51; Batty, J.S., *Cyclopedia of Western Australia*, Vol.1, 1912, p.410)

**Robert Thompson McMaster** (1865-1915) was born 29 December 1865 in Melbourne, according to his own testimony published in the *Cyclopedia of Western Australia* of 1912. McMaster stated that he attended Scotch College at Melbourne until sixteen years of age, when he was articled to well-known architect Michael Egan, and served eight years' indentures. Perhaps giving a clue to the location of his formative years, a newspaper article of December 1882 notes that a Robert McMaster was a prize-winner at Footscray State Night School; and in 1900 his father was living at Charles Street, Footscray.

With economic depression crippling Melbourne in the early 1890s, McMaster was one of the earlier band of young Victorian architects who fled to Western Australia, probably arriving at Fremantle on the *SS Tenterden* in October 1891. He initially joined the architectural staff of the Public Works Department, but in July 1892 advertised that he had established himself in practice on his own behalf at Perth, continuing until 1899, when he 'retired from the profession'. In the *Western Australian Directory* of 1893-1894 Robert is listed in partnership with engineer Frederick George Renou, who had married at Footscray in 1891, perhaps indicating an earlier association with McMaster.

Among the prominent Federation style Perth buildings for which McMaster was credited are the Central Arcade from Murray Street to Wellington Street, United Service Hotel in St George's Terrace, Ozone Hotel in Adelaide Terrace, and Smith's Chambers in Barrack Street. His residential structures included the Burt family's *Tukurua* at Rosendo Street Cottesloe of 1896 (an upper storey designed by Talbot Hobbs was added in 1901); his own weatherboard house of

1896 on elevated ground at 105 Berwick Street Victoria Park; and the Herbert Devenish house of 1896 at 86 Mackie Street Victoria Park. McMaster was the architect of the Broken Hill Hotel at Victoria Park, built in 1897-1898. He was a prominent community member who gave much time to the Municipality of Victoria Park, first as Chairman and then as Mayor 1897-1898. McMaster Street (previously Hereford Street) in Victoria Park is named in his honour.

McMaster may have been an early member of the West Australian Institute of Architects, but he changed direction and focused on pastoralism in 1899, although he again listed himself as an architect in directories of 1905-1906 when he was working on projects such as the Central Arcade. In the twentieth century he claimed 'considerable landed interests in the State, owning large pastoral and agricultural properties in the eastern districts', and devoted a great deal of time to breeding stock on his farm at Merredin. McMaster also had a strong interest in military matters, and upon the departure for South Africa of troops was placed in charge of the second Western Australian contingent in 1900, with the rank of Captain. He served in the Boer War, and was decorated with both Queen's and King's South Africa Medals.

Robert McMaster married Emily Frances Holman in 1894 and they had children: Ray Halliday born 1894, died aged 17 in 1912 in a fall from a horse near Merredin; Emily Vernon born 1896, died at 6 days old in Perth; Alwyn Robert born 1899 died aged 23 years in 1922 at Manjimup; Alice Frances Nonna born c.1902 (married B.G. Stubbs 1928); Eric Frank born 1904 died aged 21 years in 1926 at Roebourne; and Jessie Lorn born 1906 (married M.D. Easton 1931).

On his application for a commission in the Australian Imperial Forces during late 1914, it appears McMaster understated his birth by five years, declaring at that time he was born 29 December 1870 and his age was 43 years 10 months. Travelling to fight in the 'Great War', Robert died 7 August 1915 at 'Walker's Ridge' Gallipoli, and has no known grave. His eldest surviving son at the time, Alwyn, had enlisted in June 1915, and returned safely to Australia in 1919. Tragically, Alwyn died in a farm accident in 1922, and all three of McMasters' sons died at a relatively early age. Long-suffering Emily, a talented musician, was a music teacher at Scotch College, Swanbourne for 22 years, and died at Mt Lawley in 1941, survived by only two daughters from her six children.

## References:

- 'Footscray State Night School', *Williamstown Chronicle*, 23 December 1882, p.3 (prize winner).
- 'Shipping', *Inquirer and Commercial News*, 7 October 1891, p.2 (arrival on SS *Tenterden*).
- 'Proposed Coffee Palace for Perth', *Western Mail*, 11 June 1892, p.32 (cnr Pier & Goderich St).
- 'Mr R.T. McMasters', *The West Australian*, 2 July 1892, pp.3, 5 (ex PWD commencing practice).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 3 September 1892, p.8 (cottage at Claremont).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 16 September 1892, p.8 (w-b house at Cottesloe).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 23 September 1892, p.8 (2 storey villa for Mrs Shearer Perth).
- 'News and Notes', *The West Australian*, 18 August 1894, p.5 (Presbyt Mission Hall Leederville).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 25 May 1896, p.8 (United Service Hotel for John H. Giles).
- 'Collapse of a Wall', *The West Australian*, 7 October 1896, p.7 (at United Service Hotel).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 20 August 1897, p.3 (Wesley Church at Guildford).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 18 September 1897, p.3 (hotel Adelaide Terrace: Ozone Hotel).
- 'Out on Active Service', *Independent*, 30 June 1900, p.3 (letter from Boer War, father R.T. at Charles Street Footscray).
- 'Western Australian Casualties', *The West Australian*, 26 August 1915, p.8 (death).
- 'Funeral', *The West Australian*, 17 May 1941, p.13 (funeral of Emily, family details).
- Battye, J.S., 'Captain Robert Thompson McMaster', *Cyclopedia of Western Australia*, Hussey & Gillingham for the Cyclopedia Co. Adelaide, 1912, Vol.1, p.410.
- NAA, control symbol MCMaster ROBERT THOMPSON, series no. B2455, barcode 1956099.
- NAA, control symbol MCMaster ALWYN ROBERT, series no. B2455, barcode 1956045.
- 'Broken Hill Hotel, Victoria Park', Register of Heritage Places assessment, 31 May 2013.

Contributing author: John Taylor

Heritage Committee meeting approval date: 14 August 2014 Last updated: 14 August 2014

## **Citation details:**

Taylor, Dr John J., 'Robert Thompson McMaster (1865-1915)', *Western Australian Architect Biographies*, <http://www.architecture.com.au/> accessed DATE.



United Service Hotel, St George's Terrace improved by McMaster in 1896 (SLWA 048417PD)



Burt family's *Tukurua* at Rosendo Street Cottesloe of 1896 (John Taylor, June 2008)



Smith's Chambers at 115-117 Barrack Street of 1897, at right of first photo with gable intact, and in current form with gable removed (SLWA 280017PD, Google 2014)



Ozone Hotel of 1898, at the east end of Adelaide Terrace Perth (SLWA 041232PD)



Ozone Hotel of 1898 in Adelaide Terrace Perth, November 1983 (SLWA 311923PD)



Broken Hill Hotel at Victoria Park, opened in 1898 (Baglin, Douglass, *Waterholes of Western Australia*)



The Central Arcade, Perth was demolished with the formation of Forrest Place in the 1920s. (*Western Mail*, 25 December 1904, p.51)