



Lt Gen Sir Talbot Hobbs c.1919

(Courtesy Tony Hobbs)

Hobbs, Sir Joseph John Talbot (1864-1938), was born in Pimlico, London. The first of eight children, he was given into the care of John Hurst, a contractor at Teddington, at fifteen. Hobbs acted as Hurst's office boy, and as he developed, a draftsman for the business. Hurst moved to the south coast of England in 1880, where Hobbs benefited from modest architectural training. The builder decided to migrate to Australia, and Hobbs travelled with the family, arriving at Fremantle in February 1887.

The term of Hobbs' engagement with Hurst was completed on 1 September 1887, and he soon obtained his own architectural work. Hobbs built a house in Perth and married the eldest Hurst daughter in 1890. His business ledgers for the sole-practice period of 1887-1904 are now kept in the Battye Library at Perth. They reveal that by 1896 Hobbs' annual profit had grown to a phenomenal £4,688. Hotels, banks, houses, warehouses, and factories are all well represented on the job list. With many projects during gold-boom years, Hobbs ran offices in both Perth and Fremantle, commuting by train in the later 1890s from his home at Peppermint Grove. With an influx of skilled architects, accompanied by builders, tradesmen and artisans who brought with them knowledge of innovative developments in architecture, gold-boom WA was at

the forefront of Australian architecture at the end of the nineteenth century, and Hobbs' was the leading architectural practice. In the 1890s, he was instrumental in the formation of the West Australian Institute of Architects (WAIA), providing outstanding ongoing service to the profession, and to the community. He invested with foresight for the future, allowing the pursuit of his other 'passion', artillery.

Following Federation, Hobbs' architectural work showed a wider recognition of broader Australian ideas and construction, yet we still see local distinctiveness in his designs, exemplified in efforts to utilise local building stones. Hobbs was elevated to the presidency of WAIA in 1909-1911, where he provided wise leadership and guidance to fellow professionals on many important issues, notably registration. However, whereas architecture had been his profession until 1914, world events altered his destiny. Following the onset of the First World War, design work was discarded in favour of dutiful service.

In August 1914, Hobbs was appointed to command the 1st Australian Divisional Artillery. Hobbs' meticulous planning skills, honed by thirty years of architectural work, combined with previous ongoing military study, were fully utilised in the army. He served with distinction at Gallipoli and on the Western Front. At the end of the war Hobbs succeeded John Monash in charge of the Australian Army Corps, and played a pivotal role in the design and development of Australian war memorials in France and Belgium. Lieutenant General Sir J.J. Talbot Hobbs KCB KCMG VD returned a hero to Fremantle in late 1919. The major change to his persona, following participation in the war, was that he was then marked as a great soldier. Had circumstances been otherwise, by 1920 he may have been better known as a leading Australian architect. Able to boast the architectural post nominals FRWAIA, FRVIA, and FRIBA, in the 1920s Hobbs advised the Commonwealth Government on a number of major architectural competitions.

Hobbs returned to London in 1924 as a commissioner at the Empire Exhibition. He continued to make substantial contributions in the public realm in the 1930s, representing Australia at the League of Nations. Talbot Hobbs embarked in April 1938 for the opening of the Australian Memorial at Villers Bretonneux, France that he had ensured was brought to fruition. After just a few days at sea, he died aged 73. Following Hobbs' death he was accorded a national funeral, and the construction of the Hobbs Memorial at Perth in 1940 was a further mark of public esteem.

Stylistically, Hobbs developed his English building background with designs that were responsive to local conditions. Some of his better-known works remaining include the Windsor Hotel, Swan Brewery Complex, St Brigid's School, St Alban's Church, Dilhorn, The Weld Club, Newspaper House, State War Memorial, St George's College, Christ Church, Dalgety Buildings, Scots Church, Samson House, and Victoria Hall.

References: Taylor, J.J., *Joseph John Talbot Hobbs (1864-1938) and his Australian-English Architecture*, PhD thesis, Faculty of Architecture Landscape and Visual Arts, University of Western Australia, 2010, found at <http://theses.library.uwa.edu.au/adt-WU2010.0100/>

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Heritage Committee meeting approval date: 11 June 2009 Last updated: 11 March 2013

Citation details:

Taylor, Dr John J., 'Sir Joseph John Talbot Hobbs (1864-1938)', Western Australian Architect Biographies, <http://www.architecture.com.au/i-cms?page=13453>, accessed DATE.



Moir's Chambers s-w cnr Barrack Street & St George's Tce, Perth 1897; and Hobbs Memorial, 1940
(SLWA 001302D, John Taylor 2008)



The Weld Club, Barrack Street, Perth 1892 and the Swan Brewery Mounts Bay Road, Perth 1894-on
(John Taylor 2008, 2004).