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# INTRODUCTION

As a child growing up near Sir J.J. Talbot Hobbs' family home in Perth's Peppermint Grove, I was always vaguely aware of the man's elevated status. I knew that his impact had been so profound that he had been marked with a statue on the Swan River foreshore. As an adult, trained in architecture and working on the conservation of the built environment, it seemed natural to be undertaking research that would both clarify Hobbs' accomplishments, and raise awareness of the importance of maintaining his already depleted portfolio. As my knowledge of his achievements grew, I became impatient with the fact that many people had noticed his monument on the Swan River foreshore, but few knew much of the man or his significance.

Several problems confront attempts to interpret Hobbs' contribution to architecture. One is that a number of his most prominent buildings have been demolished. Another is that national recognition of his achievements as a First World War Army General have overshadowed his extraordinary pre- and post-war career as an architect. Military service was intrinsic to his character, and thus is woven into this architectural biography.

There are many complex factors that shaped Hobbs' work. Influences include Victorian England; his education; the English Gothic Revival and Arts and Crafts movements; his first employer John Hurst; architectural journals; Australian nationalism; and Federation architecture. His developing social position, reaction to Western Australian opportunity in gold-rush times, connections with prominent government and society leaders, and work for banks and for the Church of England, are revealed here as a result of research into Australian and English records.

Hobbs' descendants have always believed that he had no architectural training or education, yet given his immediate output in Western Australia and evidence found in published sources, this seems unlikely. Research for this book has uncovered important new knowledge about Hobbs' upbringing, his training in England during the 1880s, the circumstances of his arrival in Western Australia, and his beginnings in practice.

Talbot Hobbs was a leading architect in the mid-1890s when, as a result of a gold rush, Perth suddenly found itself at the forefront of Australian development. The scores of experienced architects that arrived at the time brought with them knowledge of technical innovations, as well as an awareness of significant overseas developments in architecture and building. No doubt Hobbs saw and discussed the work of his contemporaries. Was he also aware of and influenced by the theories and designs of other Australian architects? Was he working with an architectural approach that included notions of national identity, local adaptation of Arts and Crafts principles, and local building practices developing rapidly with an influx of skilled workers into the State during the period? How can these ingredients be shown to have shaped the architecture that he produced? Did he become an *Australian* architect – striving to produce an Australian style? Or did he still consider himself an English designer simply using a Victorian design palette to make a living in a part of the British Empire? These are just some of the issues that confront Hobbs' biographer. This book illustrates Hobbs' architecture within a significant period in Australian history – where the 1890s gold-boom influx of people and money to Western Australia was followed by many high-quality buildings of homogeneous architectural style.

Over time, Western Australia has recognised only a small number of its local public figures through memorial statues. Persons commemorated include Yagan, Paddy Hannan, Maitland Brown, Alex Forrest, John Forrest, C.Y. O'Connor, John Curtin – and Talbot Hobbs. Yet few in the early 21st century are aware of Hobbs' many and varied achievements. This book addresses that inadequacy and fills a void. It documents the facts of Hobbs' prolific life,

examining factors that influenced his architectural style, comparing his work with that of his contemporary architects, and analysing his influence on Australian architecture.

**John J. Taylor**

B Arch (UWA) MA (York) PhD (UWA)