R.S. DODS AND THE QUEENSLAND HOUSE

(Abstract)

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The houses in Queensland designed by Robert Smith Dods (1868-1920) were in or near Brisbane and date from 1896 until 1913, when Dods moved to Sydney. Of the fifty or so houses built only half remain and of those few survive unaltered.

Dods's domestic work adopted the Queensland house tradition but introduced a new solidity. He refined its details, threw off its cheap decoration and gave it new dignity. His houses looked significantly different, yet were rooted in what he saw as a regional vernacular.

By training in Britain during the mid 1880s to the early 1890s Dods was necessarily influenced by such figures as Voysey and Norman Shaw, as his work confirms. He was contemporary with men such as Lutyens and C.R. Macintosh. The arts and crafts based philosophy which Dods also adopted, well fitted a regional approach. His use of vernacular elements and materials peculiar to a region, but mixed with a variety of period sources, was a common aspiration among British-trained architects of the time, at least in domestic work. Dods was perhaps the most accomplished exponent of the so called 'Edwardian free style' to be seen in Australia.

Dods's houses had generous, well-proportioned 'bones,' with simple yet substantial details. External colours were confined to white frames on a brown ground and red roof. The roofs were pitched high, cranked at the verandah line and ventilated in various ways. Corrugated iron was abandoned for terra-cotta when it could be afforded and when it could not flat iron was used with prominent rolled joints.

Verandahs swelled into outdoor rooms or shrank to corridors as functions dictated. Verandah posts were often 6 in. x 3 in. or 8 in. x 4 in., showing a broad face, instead of the conventional 4 in. x 4 in. post. The detailing of timber elements was comparatively oversized yet perfectly in scale, the construction both solid and honestly expressed.

Planning was uncluttered for ease of ventilating breezes yet skilfully resolved in subtle relationships.

French lights were often double the normal width. Mouldings were never standard, and always looked right. Main rooms more often than not were expanded with bay windows or oriel and included built-in furniture. The bathrooms were sensibly located in the midst of the bedrooms and even the earth closet was under the same roof.

When compared to domestic work in Britain at the height of the Empire, Dods's houses were never grand buildings. Even in Australia they were modest due to the relative poverty of the north after Federation. Judged by contemporary standards, however, they do remain both relevant and gems of a Queensland domestic ideal.