Robert J Haddon, Consulting Architect

Roslyn Hunter is one of the latest of the University of Melbourne's interminable line of graduates in architecture. Her article here is a precis of research work she completed in her final year and exposes a little more clearly the work of that somewhat mystical but most influential architectural figure Robert Haddon.

Robert Haddon began his architectural practice as a consultant in Melbourne in 1901. By 1902 he was described as "well and favourably known in the profession as an expert and original designer, with well developed artistic gifts". It is of interest therefore that only three buildings in Victoria have been identified which bear his name as architect before 1912, all of them executed in 1906. Two were designed in conjunction with other architects.

In fact his reputation as a prominent Melbourne architect of the Federation period from 1900 has been based on but few of his buildings; the best known being his own home Anseim in Caulfield (1906), and the remodelling of two city facades, for the Fourth Victoria Building Society, Collins Street (1912 and subsequently altered), and the Wharf Labourers', Flinders Street (1916, and altered). In the past these, and few other buildings, have served as examples of Haddon's striving for both simplicity and suitability in design. However lesser known works, such as his conversion of the Hoadley Jam Factory into the residential Alexandra Mansions in South Melbourne (1912, demolished), the North Melbourne Picture Theatre (1913, altered) and many houses also demonstrate originality. In addition, the designs that Haddon executed for other architects and which formed a great proportion of his early work, show his attempt to eliminate the thoughtless copying of past forms and elements of decoration, and his rejection of preconceived ideas and styles.

As a consultant, Haddon executed perspectives, preliminary sketches, working drawings and specifications for other architects. In the extreme case, all he eliminated from their jobs was the building's supervision, and in this way he became the architect of buildings with which his name is not commonly associated. Only rare documentary evidence can positively identify much of his work and establish the extent of his architectural input in a design. An analysis of his known buildings and drawings, verbal confirmation and his writings can be used as sources of identification. Concerning the latter, two important writings are Haddon's section on "Australian Planning and Construction" in the British publication Modern Buildings; Their Planning, Construction and Equipment (ed. G A T Middleton, 1905-6) and his own book, Australian Architecture (Melbourne, 1908).
There are many architects with whom Haddon's name can be connected. One of his earliest associations, with the firm Sydney Smith and Ogg, appears to have continued for many years. Having worked for them when he first arrived in Melbourne in 1889, he re-established this connection on his return from working in other States in 1899. The following year, Sydney Smith and Ogg applied for two building permits for private hospitals, one in Flinders Lane, Melbourne, and the other in Wellington Parade, East Melbourne.

The former, now known as Milton House, was illustrated by Haddon in both the *Royal Victorian Institute of Architects Journal* and *Modern Buildings* in 1905, and in the latter he noted the simple lines of the facade and the restraint of the general massing. Both these qualities are important aspects of Haddon's own work. The plain surface of the symmetrical, red brick facade incorporates a select number of decorative elements, each applied to fulfil a specific function. For example a terracotta band course, which displays a repetitive motif, provides the elevation with continuity by linking together elements of the facade. Such a band course appears in subsequent work by Haddon, and in his book *Australian Architecture*.

The inherent qualities of wrought iron are displayed in the florid entrance grille, known to be designed by Haddon himself. This material was often praised by Haddon and employed in his own work and is seen again in later hotels commonly credited to Smith and Ogg.

It appears that Haddon designed the facade of Milton House, but his criticism of its planning in *Modern Buildings*, suggests that his architectural input did not extend beyond the front elevation.

1. Milton House, 25 Flinders Lane, Melbourne, 1900.
The other private hospital, Eastbourne House, also displays facades which appear to have been designed by Haddon. Elements which reappear in his subsequent work are applied to the plain red brick surfaces; all are threaded together to form asymmetrical facades which experiment with the balance of mass.

The corner tower of Eastbourne House is similar to those adopted by Haddon in a scheme for the Subiaco Industrial School, Western Australia (1896) and later at Anselm (1906) and also in a bank design illustrated in Australian Architecture. They all include saucer-like domes from which rise finials or flagpoles. A terracotta string course is again employed at Eastbourne House, and curvilinear wrought iron gutter brackets, as seen here, appear subsequently in much of Haddon's work. The peacock tail trails which form the wrought iron balcony railings are seen again in the building at 45-47 Spring Street, Melbourne (c.1900, demolished) and may connect Haddon's name with its accredited architect, Guyon Purchas.

Eastbourne House also incorporates a parapet motif in the form of an inverted scallop which is subsequently seen in work in both Melbourne and Geelong. Using an almost identical parapet detail to that of Eastbourne House, terraces at 68-70 Clarendon Street, East Melbourne (1908) display these motifs adjacent to triangular pediments, suggesting that the same architect designed both these buildings. However because the firm Grainger, Little and Barlow are the accredited architects for the latter, it appears that Haddon may have been involved. Adding weight to this, he had already formed an association with John Grainger, who was Chief Architect at the Public Works Department, Perth, during Haddon's term of employment there in the 1890s, and with John Little at the Working Men's College, where they worked together as chief instructors in architecture from 1902 to 1912.

Haddon continued to execute work for Sydney Smith and Ogg, and buildings such as the mansion Ettrick near Lismore (1901) and hotels erected from 1911 continue to incorporate distinctive elements and demonstrate his principles of simplicity and suitability in design. The Bendigo Hotel (1911) incorporates corner towers as previously described and the plain, once red brick, surface displays a reduction in applied decoration. As a result the hotel sign, which forms an integral part of the elevation, becomes the focal point of the facade. Such a reduction in facadal elements and applied decoration became typical of Haddon's work, culminating in his design for the Art and Science Building, Swinburne Technical College, Hawthorn (1917). It was here that the building became a signboard with the north elevation devoid of decoration except for the lettering itself. Other hotels, such as the Perserverence, Fitzroy (1911) and the Dan O'Connell, Carlton (1913), attributed to Sydney Smith and Ogg, can be compared with Haddon's hotel design illustrated in Australian Architecture.
Robert Haddon also formed an association with George B Leith, and it was A C Leith who absorbed the practice of Haddon and Henderson on Haddon's death in 1929. This association may have been formed in 1904 with the design of the Camperdown Methodist Church illustrated in Modern Buildings. Haddon commended this church for its pleasing and original composition; high praise in a time when he saw so many churches of the 'dog kennel' type. The design blends a traditional form with new and carefully selected elements to create an original composition, and the plan itself can be compared with one illustrated in Australian Architecture.
His association with Leith is confirmed in 1906, when Haddon was the consulting architect and Leith the supervising architect for a house in Sydney Road, Brunswick. Here the two-storey facade displays subtle asymmetry in its placement of elements which were carefully selected and applied in restraint to the plain surface. Semicircular inverted scallops appear on the parapet and elements such as a vertical wrought iron finial and the oeil de boeuf window are typical of his work.
This same year Haddon designed the Malvern Presbyterian Church, with Arthur Peck as the supervising architect and, in the first two decades of this century, it appears that his name can be associated with such architects as Augustus A Fritsch, Phillip Kennedy, Godfrey and Spowers, Warburton P Knights, Michael McCabe, Tombs and Durran and Laird and Barlow (later Laird and Buchan). The latter, a Geelong firm, had established a connection with Haddon by 1904 and this continued until at least 1916. Over this period Haddon produced drawings with a varying degree of his own architectural input. This is reflected in his remuneration as recorded in twenty-three entries in this firm's cash books.

It is likely that his first involvement was with the Friendly Societies Dispensary, Geelong, which was illustrated and commended by Haddon in Modern Buildings. The design itself incorporates elements and illustrates principles typical of Haddon's work, including subtle asymmetry, curvilinear decoration, bow windows, glazed tiles, red brickwork and bands of cement render, to name just a few. In addition the sign has been included as an integral part of the facade and the parapets of the two flanking shops incorporate a variation of the inverted scallop motif on their parapets.

As Haddon did not execute the final drawings for this building, it appears that his input went beyond this, to the design itself. On the other hand, it appears that he merely completed the drawings for Laird and Buchan, for such jobs as the Waterworks and Sewerage Trust Building, Geelong (1911, demolished) and the Newtown and Chilwell Council Council Offices (1916).

In December 1913, Laird and Buchan signed a contract for cottage homes in Ryrie Street, Geelong, and in this same month Haddon received a substantial payment from this firm.

6. Corner tower, cottage home, 343 Ryrie Street, Geelong, 1913.
On examination of the building, the inverted scallop motif on the parapet of a side tower, the plain surfaces employed, and the asymmetrical placement of masses, suggest that Haddon may have been involved in the design. The use of one simple gable roof form is typical of Haddon's own domestic work from 1913, such as 'Lauraston', East New (1915, demolished).

Similarities in banks designed early this century suggest that one architect may have been involved in their conception, and this may again increase the extent of Haddon's work and influence in Victoria. In his report "Banks in Victoria, 1851-1939", Bruce Trethowan states that the work of the firms Godfrey and Spowers, Tombs and Durran and Sydney Smith and Ogg shows similar characteristics. This becomes evident on examination of particular banks.

One of the earliest buildings concerned is the Bank of New South Wales in Kyneton (1903). Although Richard Aitken, in his thesis Edwardian Geelong: an Architectural Introduction, suggests that Tombs and Durran or Sydney Smith and Ogg may have been responsible for this design, it was Godfrey and Spowers who called tenders for the building. The composition of the main facade and the inclusion of elements such as the inverted scallop parapet motif in an overall asymmetrical, yet balanced way, suggest Haddon's involvement. Precursory of much of his later work, applied decoration is reduced to a minimum, allowing the sign to become the prominent feature.

The erection of this bank was followed by others in that decade, and a comparison of three State Savings Banks suggests the influence of one architect in their designs. The first was the addition to a single storey building to form the bank at Camperdown (1906) and the others were erected in 1909 at Armadale and Yarraville. These banks are accredited to Tombs and Durran, Godfrey and Spowers and Sydney Smith and Ogg respectively.

The front facades of these two-storey, red brick bank buildings are all highlighted with cement render contrasts and all incorporate octagonal piers, an oriel bay window at first floor level, arched openings at ground floor level and florid decoration between the two levels. The only pronounced difference in their conception is the form adopted for the other window in the upper level; arched at Camperdown, rectangular at Armadale and circular at Yarraville. It is also interesting to note the reappearance of the terracotta band course at the Yarraville branch building. Designed in a similar vein, such State Savings Banks as Moonee Ponds (1905), Elsternwick (1907), Camberwell (1907) and Traralgon (1909), are commonly attributed to Sydney Smith and Ogg.
7. State Savings Bank, Camperdown, 1906 (addition to existing building).


The original building was the corner section only.
It was not until 1912 that the quantity of work Haddon produced for himself appears to exceed that which he executed for other architects, and a select number of these buildings in particular were exceedingly daring in their originality. As Haddon strove for simplicity, facades became signs, with words and symbols describing the function of the particular building. Boat prows projecting from the facade depicted the functions of the Wharf Labourers' Building and gables projecting from the old factory building provided Alexandra Mansions with a suitable domestic air. Haddon's domestic designs continued to explore simplicity both in external elevation treatment and internally in his use of an open plan, and throughout his career his design work extended to details of a building such as door handles, hinges, lighting fixtures, furniture and finials.

Haddon continued to produce highly original designs until his death. However there is little doubt that over his lifetime, there were many more buildings erected with which he was involved. A list of his work, and possible work, has been included in the report Robert Joseph Haddon Architect, 1866-1929, but further discoveries of material will continue to reveal architects and buildings with which he was associated. In this way the full extent of Robert Haddon's practice and his influence on others will be realised.

Roslyn Hunter.
NOTES:


2. Letter from Haddon dated 11 June 1902. Inward Correspondence, Victorian Artists' Society Manuscripts, and Letters from architect, Michael McCabe to Haddon, dated 2 August 1904 to 9 September 1904. Letter in possession of Mr A Willingham, 151 McKean Street, North Fitzroy.


5. Drawing, Public Works Department, Perth.

6. Haddon remained an instructor there until 1926.


8. Drawings, Melbourne University Archives.


10. Cash Books of Laird and Barlow, Geelong 1899-1921, at the Geelong Historical Records Centre.

11. Drawings, Laird and Barlow, at the Geelong Historical Records Centre.


15. R Hunter, op.cit.