

INTRODUCTION

John Smith Murdoch

This thesis presents John Smith Murdoch (1862-1945), architect and public servant and examines the significance of his contribution to the development of Australian architecture between 1885 and 1929. His ability to combine successfully the often mutually exclusive roles of designer and Government employee earned him considerable national respect from the architectural profession and the public service. In this dual role, substantial design constraints were placed upon him which included the economic considerations determined by the public purse. As a representative of Government, he was also entrusted to embody the nation's values in architectural terms, as well as adhering to the architectural practices of his profession. The extent of his architectural contribution in Australia is highlighted by Murdoch himself:

As Designer or Supervisor, or both, the buildings engaged upon number very many hundreds of every kind, and in value from a quarter of a million pounds downwards. Due to my position in the Department, probably no person has had a wider experience of buildings in Australia including its tropics ... [I have had] a leading connection with the design of practically all Commonwealth building works during the above period [1904-28].¹

A List of Works is provided in Appendix 1 as evidence of his substantial architectural repertoire; the extent of which suggests that the work is of historical importance. Despite a prolific output and acknowledgement for raising 'architecture in Australia to a high level'² between 1910 and 1920, this is the first critical study of his life and work. Three reasons are immediately evident in determining why Murdoch has not previously been the subject of scholarly analysis. First, Murdoch eschewed extravagance in both his professional and private life and secondly his designs were tempered by the above-mentioned constraints of his Government position. The third reason is perhaps conjectural: lacking the charisma of his Modernist contemporaries, he was not thought sufficiently innovative to attract attention.

A Lack of Recognition for Murdoch's Work

i. An Architect of Humility

Murdoch's 'dry and quiet personality'³ no doubt contributed to his professional obscurity. Throughout his life and career, he remained a 'lime-light dodger',⁴ shunning publicity and never publishing any writings or drawings.⁵ The two known official

¹ J.S. Murdoch to K. O'Malley, Minister for Home Affairs, 1 December, 1915, O'Malley Papers,, National Library of Australia, Canberra, and J.S. Murdoch, 'Application for Registration, Architects' Registration Board of Victoria', 31 January, 1928, Bill Murdoch Private Collection, Melbourne.

² 'Man Who Inspired Much of Our Best Architecture', *The Herald*, Melbourne, 22 May, 1945, p.5.

³ C.S. Daley, 'Much Ado About Nothing', in P.A. Selth (ed.), *Canberra Collection*, Lowden Publishing, Kilmore, 1976, p.219.

⁴ 'Personal - Congratulations given to Mr J.S. Murdoch on the occasion of his 60th Birthday', *The Sun*, Melbourne, 30 September, 1924.

⁵ There is only one article published during Murdoch's career which acknowledges him as the author. It was actually compiled by the journal's editor from a talk given by Murdoch on

photographs of him in c.1915 show him looking away from the camera. It is not surprising that contemporary newspaper articles about him or his work are generally brief and speculative. Yet Murdoch was a remarkable character, 'of wide culture and human sympathy'⁶ and a prominent Freemason for at least part of his career.⁷ It seems he preferred to command the respect of his junior officers through knowledge and experience - and especially through dogged diplomacy - rather than through outspokenness. A long-time friend and colleague, Charles Daley, wrote in the *Canberra Times* in 1965 that he was 'one of the finest characters of the older generation of Commonwealth public servants' and through 'his knowledge, ability, and integrity, Murdoch stood high in the estimation of his colleagues and of Governments.'⁸ This does not suggest he was a timid leader. He set 'a high standard of values in conception and practice'⁹ in his Government architectural offices, and he expected his officers to emulate them closely.

ii. Professional Duality

Murdoch's dual roles as architect and public servant have also contributed to his professional obscurity. As a loyal Government employee, his personal opinions were never aired beyond the inner domain of the bureaucracy. He was constantly challenged to accommodate the whims of Government in an architecture which satisfied both his underlying personal and bureaucratic philosophies. Generally, it seems his respect for bureaucratic process outweighed any creative extravagance and this regard is reflected in a statement he made in 1916: 'effecting economy for the people entuses me more than any scheme from its architectural side.'¹⁰ In later years he also stressed that 'architecture must be the handmaiden of purpose.'¹¹ It is therefore his combined architect-bureaucrat attitude within the stifling and complex nature of the Government service that have contributed to the lack of understanding and appreciation of the individuality of Murdoch's work. In this context, he resembles some of

Canberra. See J.S. Murdoch, 'A Short Talk on the Buildings at Canberra', *Journal of the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects*, Melbourne, November, 1924, pp.158-163.

⁶ See E. Cruickshank (nee Scrivenor) to C.S. Daley, 2 June, 1962, C.S. Daley Papers, Canberra and District Historical Society, Canberra and C.S. Daley, 'An Early Architect', in the *Canberra Times*, 3 March, 1965. The writings of Daley have been confidently relied upon throughout this thesis. His close associations with Murdoch and his vast experience working in the Commonwealth public service are well documented. Comparing some of his material with published accounts, such as J. Gibbney, *Canberra 1913-1953*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1988, Daley is accurate in his assessments. See the bibliography for a full listing of Daley's publications.

⁷ 'Obituary: Mr. J.S. Murdoch', in *The Herald*, Melbourne, 21 May, 1945, p.3. The article states that Murdoch 'was a prominent Freemason during his younger days in Brisbane.'

⁸ Daley, *op.cit.*

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ J.S. Murdoch, 'Minutes of Evidence - Royal Commission into Federal Capital Administration, (1) Issues Relating to Mr Griffin', *Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers*, (unpublished), 1916, column 1005, in D.I. McDonald Papers, Canberra and District Historical Society, Canberra.

¹¹ See J.S. Murdoch, 'Minutes of Evidence - Erection of the School of Public Health', *Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers*, vol.4, part 1, 1926-28, pp.831-833.

his Colonial Government predecessors like James Barnet in New South Wales (1860-90), George Temple-Poole in Western Australia (1885-97) and John James Clark in Queensland (1883-85).¹²

Another reason for Murdoch's obscurity was his traditionalist architectural principles. This thesis argues that traditionalist architecture may have a valid and creditable place in Australian history and that Murdoch has made an unacknowledged but no less valuable contribution to the development of Australian architecture. Where avant garde architects contested all links with past architecture (especially Classicism), Murdoch worked within an alternative architectural, modern stream, appearing to compromise stylistic conceits and details. Murdoch's *raison d'être* was nonetheless utilitarian but adhered to an ideology in part personal although totally congruent with the values of Government. His traditionalist doctrine was rooted to the Classical principles of Greece, Italy and France, partly because he was cautious about trying new methods and partly because these new methods he took to be a passing fashion.¹³ He could not ennoble them into his bureaucratic architectural ingenuity because he was unable to attach symbolic value sufficiently important for public architecture of the period. Murdoch championed the notion that the 'foundation of all aesthetics in [Classical] architecture is utility.'¹⁴ It was a typical governmental ideology, especially in the 1920s,¹⁵ not dissimilar to the claims of the International Style protagonists whose aesthetic principles were enshrined in the statements that 'less is more' and 'ornament is a crime.'¹⁶

It is fundamental that the appropriate background and context of traditionalist architects like Murdoch be understood. As Government employees, they had to be community-conscious and not defenders of individual whims. Bridge's and McDonald's discussion of the aesthetic requirements placed on Barnet in *James Barnet Colonial Architect* has several parallels with the requirements imposed on Murdoch:

As an art form, architecture reflects the cultural attitudes of a community and the aesthetic standards of its patrons. Barnet's patrons were the public and his task was that of an official interpreter of the taste of the community. He was not free to produce buildings which reflected the whims of individual clients or which overreached current fashion. His buildings had to have public acceptance, as interpreted by politicians.¹⁷

¹² See P. Bridges & D. McDonald, *James Barnet Colonial Architect*, Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, 1988, R.& J. Oldham, *George Temple-Poole Architect of the Golden Years 1885-1897*, University of Western Australia Press, Newlands, 1980 and J. Fowler, 'Gold Rush to Black Wednesday': The Melbourne *Treasury* and John James Clark's Public Works Department Career from 1852 to 1878', vol.1, M.A. Thesis, Monash University, 1992.

¹³ J.S. Murdoch to C. Riddle, Governor of the Commonwealth Bank, 1 August, 1927, A106/1, G27/720, Australian Archives (A.C.T.).

¹⁴ J.S. Murdoch, 'Minutes of Evidence - Erection of the National Museum of Australian Zoology, Canberra', *Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers*, vol.4, part 1, 1926-28, pp.495-501.

¹⁵ It was certainly typical in America. See for example, L. Craig, *The Federal Presence: Architecture, Politics, and Symbols in United States Government Building*, M.I.T., Massachusetts, 1978, p.282.

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ Bridges & McDonald, *op.cit.*, p.52.

Considerable skill was required to design works which broadly reflected the community's needs and also be economical and contemporary in appearance. Creativity came from continually rethinking and reworking designs, and particularly their details, as Murdoch explains:

My experience is the better the man, probably the more alterations will take place in his work. Every day that he lives, if his imagination is at work at all, he will see ways of improving that building. I do not say improvements in principle, but in detail.¹⁸

For this reason, the thesis contextualises Murdoch according to his historical importance in building a national image that was consistent with international trends in public architecture rather than in Modernist terms.

iii. Traditionalist versus Modernist: An Analytical Review

An indifference to Murdoch's work by scholars and critics since the Second World War has further denied him a fair assessment of his professional and architectural achievements. It is only in recent times that traditionalist architecture has been recognised on an equal level as the avant garde developments of the Modernist movement.¹⁹

In 'Moderately Modern: Interpreting the Architecture of the Public Works Administration' in America, L.B. Reitzes argues that a Modernist bias restricted 'the field of American architecture considered worthy of study', forcing scholarly attention on a very select area of architectural development, and for 'quite a while, the rest of American architecture ceased to exist.'²⁰ Reitzes continues:

Of course, the rest of American architecture ceased to exist only in scholarly terms. The buildings were still there ... One of the most striking features of "avant-gardism" as an interpretive strategy is the way that this criticism/history succeeded in devaluing the part of American architecture from this period which was most physically present ... The discrepancy between architectural history and architectural reality is not confined to writings about this period, but in this case the physical evidence is so ubiquitous in daily life - in the houses, schools, shops, civic buildings, fire stations, and libraries we use or inhabit.²¹

18 Murdoch, 'Minutes of Evidence - Royal Commission into Federal Capital Administration', *op.cit.*, column 1020.

19 For example, Murdoch's Colonial predecessors including Clark and Barnet were only largely recognised by architectural historians in the late 1980s and 1990s, in works including Fowler, *op.cit.* and Bridges & McDonald, *op.cit.*

20 L.B. Reitzes, 'Moderately Modern: Interpreting the Architecture of the Public Works Administration', vol.1, PhD Thesis, University of Delaware, United States of America, 1989, pp.20-21. Reitzes argues that this Modernist bias was one of three barriers 'to the meaningful interpretation of PWA [Public Works Administration] architecture.' He claimed a second barrier was 'a fixation on quality, in which a body of architecture is best viewed with the primary purpose of identifying and selecting for study the "best" or "true" examples of a given phenomenon.' The third barrier 'concerns the degree to which architectural distinction is defined in terms which imply the rejection or devaluation of American cultural circumstance.' See pp.23-29, 30-33.

21 *ibid.*, pp.20-21.

Similarly a Modernist (and particularly functionalist) bias in the revisionist works by Australian historians of the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s seems to have contributed to a lack of any substantial study of Murdoch's significant architecture (and particularly his Commonwealth work).²²

Robin Boyd, Australia's first substantial and distinguished practitioner of architectural history,²³ is one of the earliest historians who has ignored the value of Murdoch's work. His pioneering writings are, according to Geoffrey Serle in *Robin Boyd: A Life*, primarily concerned in identifying Boyd's heroes: 'Griffin, Haddon, and Annear, bringing them into prominence for the first time, as well as Grounds, Mewton and others at the heart of the Modern Movement of the 1930s.'²⁴ In his first chapter in *Victorian Modern* (1947), Boyd portrays the historical development of Australian architecture as emanating from 'the Primitives', 'the Pioneers', 'the Opulents', and 'the Decadents' in the nineteenth century, and 'the Prophets': Griffin, Annear, Billson, Haddon and their contemporaries, in the early twentieth century.²⁵

There is no balanced mention of the considerable developments and achievements of traditionalist architects. There is no mention of the equally valid contemporary Classical idioms that Murdoch had introduced in Australia at the same time as the work of Boyd's heroes. His fleeting discussion on 'Governmental design' is focussed on the functionalist exemplars that emanated from the State Electricity Commission (S.E.C.) in the 1920s and 1930s.²⁶ Boyd's only remark on other Government developments is as follows:

The buildings produced down the years, the State secondary and technical schools, the railway stations, the public offices, had always been representative of the lower levels of the popular taste of their day.²⁷

While Boyd's Modernist bias between 1950 and 1970 seems to have been at the expense of other valid architectural fields in scholarly terms, historical fact indicates that traditionalist

22 The works can be seen as revisionist in the sense that Australian architectural history was especially revised in favour of the functionalist movement and other notable and predominantly Modern architects.

23 Boyd produced a long list of journal articles and publications between the 1940s and the 1970s. His publications include *Moderately Modern: 111 Years of Modern Architecture in Victoria*, Architectural Students' Society of the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects, Melbourne, 1947, *Australia's Home: Its Origins, Builders and Occupiers*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1952, *The Australian Ugliness*, F.W. Cheshire, Melbourne, 1960, *Kenzo Tange*, George Braziller, New York, 1962, *The Walls Around Us: The Story of Australian Architecture*, F.W. Cheshire, Melbourne, 1962, *The Puzzle of Architecture*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1965, *Living in Australia*, (with M. Strizic), Pergamon, Sydney, 1970, and *The Great Great Australian Dream*, Pergamon, Sydney, 1972. For near complete list of Boyd's writings, see K. Burns & H. Edquist (eds.), *Robin Boyd: The Architect as Critic*, Transition Publishing, Melbourne, 1989. See also G. Serle, *Robin Boyd: A Life*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1995, p.88.

24 *ibid.*, p.89.

25 Boyd, *Victorian Modern*, *op.cit.*, pp.7-12.

26 *ibid.*, pp.21-22.

27 *ibid.*, p.22.

architecture was coexistent and highly esteemed by practising architects at that time. For example, the Emily McPherson College building, Melbourne, 1924-27 (fig. 8.30), by E. Evan Smith, Chief Architect of the Victorian Public Works Department, was awarded the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects' Street Architecture Medal for 1930.²⁸ Traditionalist works like Oakley Parkes's Taxation Office building, Melbourne, c.1930 (fig. 8.55), were also used in advertising campaigns for their aesthetic appeal; in this case the wonders of Wunderlich terra cotta were brought to the attention of the architectural profession in the *Journal of the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects* in the edition of March 1931.²⁹

Boyd's emphasis on the Modern Movement and particularly functionalism is continued in another of his publications, *Australia's Home: Its Origins, Builders and Occupiers* (1952).³⁰ The closest he came to exploring the qualities of Murdoch's work is in his analysis of Canberra:

Canberra's theoretical aesthetic foundations were sound; but the idea began to weaken in the public buildings and collapsed completely in the residential districts. A minor tragedy was that Griffin himself built nothing there. The kaleidoscopic styles of the next two decades - jazz, Californian bungalow, Spanish Mission, Elizabethan - were borrowed one after another from Sydney and Melbourne. The Functionalist movement, struggling to find its feet in the same period, was not represented in housing, although its influence permeated some buildings. At best, as in the Hotel Canberra, these public buildings were planned on a strong geometric pattern reminiscent of the town itself. At worst they were unoffending, quietly geometrical in form and decoration. They were directed from Melbourne by the Government Architect and later by the Federal Capital Commission, which gathered a staff of architects in Canberra.³¹

Evident here is a reluctance or oversight in naming Murdoch as the architect of Hotel Canberra. Such an overdue analysis is addressed in Chapter Eight. It is clear Boyd's emphasis was on functionalism, and his specific critical tools were based on Modernist criteria³² which were incompatible in understanding and acknowledging the worth of Murdoch's architecture from a traditionalist viewpoint. Nevertheless these stately buildings still, albeit quietly, dominate the landscape.

In 1968, Max Freeland published another comprehensive and valuable study, *Architecture in Australia: A History*.³³ Like Boyd, he overlooks the contemporary Classical work of Murdoch and his Commonwealth and State Government contemporaries and successors. He also limits the field of architectural study and criticises developments outside this field without considered qualification. For example, while Freeland addresses the work of the

²⁸ R. Tonkin, 'Treasure Hunt: Emily McPherson College', in *Architect*, Melbourne, March, 1976, p.18.

²⁹ *Journal of Proceedings of the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects*, March 1931, p.xxiii.

³⁰ Boyd, *Australia's Home, op.cit.*, (1968 edition).

³¹ *ibid.*, pp.222-223.

³² It is not within the scope of this thesis to contribute to the Modernism/modernism debate, but this debate is acknowledged as important and has implications for this historical period.

³³ J.M. Freeland, *Architecture in Australia: A History*, Penguin Books, Ringwood, 1988 (first published by F.W. Cheshire, 1968).

Georgian Revivalist, Hardy Wilson, and the other historicist revivals of the period, his conclusions of the latter revivals are not complementary:

The Californian Bungalow, the Picturesque and the Spanish Mission styles which held sway in domestic architecture during the 1920s were basically no different in approach to the problem of Australian architecture than any of the other stylistic attitudes that had been adopted for the previous eighty years. They were essentially concerned with finding, in other places, a style suited to Australia. While the emphasis had changed from a style chosen purely for its visual effect to one which was functionally more appropriate, it was still a matter of style selection. In attempting to find climatic and social parallels to the Australian conditions and thence extracting a ready-made solution, prime concern inevitably remained with the effect rather than the cause. Until Australian architects began to consider their own causes, their work remained shallow and of the nineteenth century.³⁴

To Freeland, there was only one 'group of thinking-architects responsible for ushering in the twentieth century [and they] were Hardy Wilson, Robin Dods, Harold Desbrowe-Annear and Walter Burley Griffin.'³⁵ It seems that Freeland too, was unable to acknowledge the value of Murdoch and his contemporaries in their eclectic, stripped Classicism of the 1920s. Freeland's argument is beginning to be viewed differently today. For example, the Statement of Significance for Murdoch's Provisional Parliament House, Canberra, 1922-27, in the Register of the National Estate reads in part:

... Its innovative architectural design, modest and understated yet of imposing scale and character, tells much of Australia's capabilities and aspirations in the twenties, while being characteristic of historic Canberra.³⁶

On this same building, Apperly, Irving and Reynolds in *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture ...* state:

The clarity of shape, the regular composition, the dazzling whiteness and the pleasantly human scale of this building make it a success story in Australian public architecture which deserves greater acknowledgement than it has received.³⁷

Eric Martin in his 'East Block Draft Conservation Plan' also argues that Murdoch's East and West Secretariat Blocks, Canberra (1924-26, 1925-27), 'with their plan form designed in small office bays for the admission of natural light, represent a working environment of great value, worthy of re-examination today.'³⁸ The residential estates of Canberra are viewed differently

34 *ibid.*, p.235.

35 *ibid.*, p.236.

36 'Statement of Significance for Provisional Parliament House in the Register of the National Estate', in I. Nelsen, 'Conservation Management Plan: Old Parliament House, Canberra, ACT', Australian Construction Services, Melbourne, 1995, pp.2-3.

37 R. Apperly, R. Irving, & P. Reynolds, *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture: Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present*, Angus & Robertson, North Ryde, 1989, p.164.

38 E. Martin, 'East Block Draft Conservation Plan', Philip Cox, Taylor, Richardson & Partners, Canberra, September, 1994, p.7.

today too, as Ruth Daniell explains: 'this polyglot collection of 1920s dwellings are valued by the community and form distinctive suburbs of houses of various styles.'³⁹

These and other comments are in contrast to Boyd's and Freeland's selective stance that the only architecture of value emanated from the functionalist movement. These comments also contradict the most doctrinaire Modernist perception that the thinking architects of the early twentieth century could only have been Wilson, Dods, Griffin and their functionalist contemporaries. Traditionalist works like Murdoch's are being recognised as symbolically appropriate, workable, climatically-responsive designs that reflect the period in which they were designed. Their Classical mode of expression provides a timeless appeal to the broader community, as opposed to the transient functionalist ideology of the avant garde.

Recent journal articles, including Conrad Hamann's 'Paths of Beauty: The Afterlife of Australian Colonial Architecture, Part 1' in *Transition* (1988),⁴⁰ and publications like Ken Charlton's *Federal Capital Architecture...* (1984)⁴¹ and Peter Freeman's *Early Canberra Houses...* (1996)⁴² have also helped to redress the imbalance established by the positions of earlier historians. Hamann provides a considered account of the value judgements of Modernism in the early 1920s, and he acknowledges that Modernist attitudes were regarded by some Australian architects as 'the psychopathy of the defeated aggressors in the Great War.'⁴³ It could be argued that Boyd and Freeland in part perceived Murdoch's Classical work in a similar way. That is, the close links between stripped Classicism and Germany's Third Reich in the late 1930s has meant that this type of Classicism has been unfairly 'disparaged on political grounds'.⁴⁴

Despite lapsing into relative obscurity since his death in 1945, Murdoch was, as stated at the outset, admired by a cross section of the architectural profession during his career. John Sulman, architect and 'father of town planning' in Australia openly declared in the mid 1920s:

As regards Mr. Murdoch, I have the greatest respect for him both as an Architect and a man ... As Government Architect he has been the designer of many of the most important public buildings throughout Australia, and they all show such

³⁹ R. Daniell, 'Imported Styles', in P. Freeman (ed.), *The Early Canberra House: Living in Canberra 1911-1933*, The Federal Capital Press of Australia, Fyshwick, 1996, p.106.

⁴⁰ C. Hamann, 'Paths of Beauty: The Afterlife of Australian Colonial Architecture, Part 1', in *Transition*, Spring 1988, pp.27-44.

⁴¹ K. Charlton, *Federal Capital Architecture: Canberra 1911-1939*, National Trust of Australia (A.C.T.), Canberra, 1984.

⁴² Freeman, *op.cit.*

⁴³ Hamann, *op.cit.*, p.27.

⁴⁴ R.A.M. Stern, *Modern Classicism*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1988, p.44. It is possible that Boyd and Freeland perceived Murdoch's stripped Classical work as the psychopathy of the defeated German Nazi regime in the Second World War. The idiom was adopted by Albert Speer for the great monuments of the Third Reich, including the Zeppelinfeld (Party Congress building and grounds), and also by architects in Fascist Italy. See also B.M. Lane, *Architecture and Politics in Germany, 1918-1945*, Harvard University Press, Massachusetts, 1968, pp.193-196.

merit that they have helped to lift the architectural work of the whole Commonwealth to a higher plane.⁴⁵

Sulman's comments were also supported by Herbert Ross, one of Sydney's leading architects in private practice in the 1920s⁴⁶:

I have the highest regard for Mr. Murdoch's professional attainments. I have met few men more sincere in his outlook towards Architecture, and I have every reason to believe him to be not only a man with a highly refined architectural outlook but sound in the important essentials of construction.⁴⁷

This scenario is most revealing as there existed considerable enmity between Government and private-practising architects during Murdoch's career.

It should be stressed that Murdoch was not without his faults and made occasional errors of judgement; in the public service he could not afford to make too many. Unlike the architect in private practice (who was accountable to a single client), Murdoch was subject to attacks from Parliamentary Committees, Governments, the press and the general public for the most minor oversights.

Over the years, some have attempted to relocate Murdoch more appropriately in Australian history, striving to alter the selective perceptions established by historians like Boyd and Freeland. His friend, Charles Daley, wrote a brief newspaper article about him in 1965. Don McDonald produced an article in the *Canberra Historical Journal* in 1985 and an essay in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* in 1986. No doubt he would also have made substantial reference to Murdoch in his later publication on *The History of the Commonwealth Public Service (1901-1910)*. Unfortunately McDonald's death in the early 1990s brought this work to an abrupt end.

In the late 1980s the Commonwealth Public Works Department, known as Australian Construction Services, also attempted to bring the career of Murdoch to public attention. A report authored by Jenny Dean and directed by Roger Pegrum was completed in 1987 and titled 'Research into J.S. Murdoch First Commonwealth Architect'. A substantial amount of documentation was collected and placed into folios during the preparation of the report, to be utilised for a possible future publication. The publication never eventuated. Although the report was not an extensive study of Murdoch's work, the material Dean collected would be without equal if it were publicly accessible. These folios have disappeared mysteriously, as stated in the preface. In 1993-94, an exhibition entitled 'Out of the Dusty Plain: Building Old Parliament House' was mounted at Old (Provisional) Parliament House in Canberra and

⁴⁵ Sulman quoted in D. Bingle to the Chairman of the Commonwealth Public Service Board, 3 February, 1925, p.1, A197/1, S26/474, Australian Archives (A.C.T.), and Sulman to I. MacAlister, Secretary of the Royal Institute of British Architects, September 17, 1926, Bill Murdoch Private Collection, Melbourne.

⁴⁶ Bingle, op.cit.

⁴⁷ Ross, in *ibid.*

highlighted the significance of Murdoch and his Parliamentary design. The exhibition illustrated the characteristics of the building; the considerable energy spent building it; how it became 'one of Australia's most famous political icons.'⁴⁸: an architectural symbol of the bush capital, Canberra. Unfortunately, the work was again brief and in some instances, inaccurate.

This thesis is not the definitive biography of Murdoch nor a complete analysis of all his architecture. The work is contextualised within the portfolio of his contemporaries by way of comparative analyses which have assisted to determine Murdoch's significance. A substantial reliance has been placed on official sources including Government letters, memorandums, specifications, contract agreements, sketches, drawings, *Parliamentary Papers*, *Royal Commission Reports*, other official documentation and first-hand experience. This has meant that the public face of Murdoch has become the focus. Glimpses of his personal philosophies are given from the scant private material generously made accessible by members of the Murdoch family. Murdoch's Freemasonic membership and its effects on his personal and professional lifestyle are suggested from the available secondary sources.

iv. Thesis Argument, Structure & Building Criteria

Argument

This thesis contends that John Smith Murdoch made a significant contribution to the development of Australian architecture between 1885 and 1929. His significance is examined through his public works architecture and his service in government office. His major architectural achievements are evident in the development of a Federation Free style in Queensland at the turn of the century and in the development of a modern Renaissance idiom in Canberra in the 1920s. Both developments were based on his own interpretation of *Beaux-Arts* design and his responsiveness to the local environment. His strong sensibility towards promoting the aspirations of Government was expressed in an architecture that arguably contributed to building a national image. Concurrently, Murdoch's contribution in the Queensland Works Department and more particularly in the Commonwealth public service (he was later to be appointed the first Commonwealth Government Architect) provided leadership and continuity in institutions that were marked by successive governmental changes and developments. A key role he played in the fledgling Federal city of Canberra was in shaping its early architectural identity. The development of the argument will be addressed specifically by considering the following:

- The personal and architectural contexts and influences which affected the life and work of Murdoch;

⁴⁸ 'Out of the Dusty Plain: Building Old Provisional Parliament House', Australian Archives Exhibition Brochure, Canberra, November 1993 to March 1994.

- The type, diversity and volume of work produced by Murdoch throughout his career;
- Murdoch's aesthetic responsiveness and his compositional and technological development:

Murdoch's career between 1880 and 1930 was an extraordinary period of architectural development, with many languages and approaches to design provided throughout this period.⁴⁹ Several of these effected Murdoch, although there were many more that he ignored or rejected on philosophical grounds. Of those idioms which he adopted, there are a number of variables which are acknowledged and explored when defining Murdoch's use of specific architectural languages throughout this thesis. Foremost in the development of Murdoch's style is his *Beaux-Arts* planning and compositional methodology, and more broadly, his advocacy for Classical forms. This leads to a second variable in defining his architectural approach: politics. As a Government architect his agenda was to symbolise the aspirations of his employers, the politicians and the wider community, and so the Classical virtues of order and discipline form a significant part of understanding his work. Aesthetic, technological and constructional changes are other important variables which are examined as part of his architectural development because they effected the planning, composition and aesthetic character of his work. While the exploration and analysis of the architectural vocabularies developed by Murdoch forms an integral part of the thesis argument, short descriptions of these vocabularies are also provided in Appendix 1;

- The significance of Murdoch's work compared to his Government and non-Government counterparts within Australia and overseas; these analyses are based on a series of relationships between the composition and function and, character and construction of particular buildings;
- The dual impact of Murdoch's architectural and public service contributions on Australian architecture and Government;

Thesis Structure

This thesis is organised chronologically and thematically. The development of Murdoch's life and career is analysed against major themes. These are: his dual role as an architect and public servant; architectural language; contemporary Australian politics and culture, technological and environmental issues in architecture; and Murdoch's masonic affiliations. The following provides the thematic focus for each chapter:

Chapter One: summarises Murdoch's career in Scotland and Australia, providing an overview of his life and work.

Chapter Two: examines Murdoch's family background and particularly the Scottish architectural training that established his Classical roots emanating from Neo-Classical and *Beaux-Arts* philosophy.

⁴⁹ Refer to the Timeline (fig. 1.1) in Chapter One for a tabulation of the architectural developments throughout these years.

Chapter Three: focuses on Murdoch's conscious endeavours to combine an architectural vocation with a public service career between 1885 and 1929. It explores the reasons leading to his emigration and the cultural context for his arrival to Melbourne and Brisbane in the 1880s.

Chapter Four: analyses Murdoch's first major series of buildings in Queensland at Federation (1901), providing a cultural, political and architectural context for their compositional and stylistic development.

Chapter Five: centres on Murdoch's architectural transition between 1910 and 1920, as his work developed from the Edwardian Baroque into the modern French Renaissance. The chapter further examines his utilisation of contemporary construction and technology, including reinforced concrete and steel. These stylistic and constructional changes were the result of the ideas and influences Murdoch experienced during an official overseas tour in 1912-13. The effects of the tour in architectural terms also forms a significant part of this chapter.

Chapter Six: emphasises the increasing challenges Murdoch faced as a public servant, particularly during the early development of the Federal Capital, Canberra, from 1909 until the 1920s.

Chapter Seven: is a case study of Provisional Parliament House, 1921-27, and establishes the reasons why Murdoch was the commissioned architect. It explores the development of the plan, composition and its modern Renaissance eclecticism, Murdoch's best-known architectural achievement.

Chapter Eight: considers the extent of Murdoch's development of an identifiable national image of Government in selected modern Renaissance examples of the 1920s.

Chapter Nine: establishes Murdoch's significance as both an architect and public servant within Australia, and explores the impact of his work after his retirement and death.

Building Criteria

The buildings discussed and analysed in this thesis have been selected according to the following criteria:

- The building is significant for:
 - indicating a particular development in Murdoch's career;
 - forming part of, or its design has been influenced by, an important cultural or political event or period in Australian history;
 - making a significant contribution to public works architecture in Australia;
- Information in the form of photographs, documentary evidence and drawings about the building is readily available.

- While this criteria is established to examine Murdoch's most substantial public buildings, this thesis does not attempt to explore what has been labelled the "Early Commonwealth Vernacular",⁵⁰ the stylistic vocabulary developed by Murdoch between 1910 and 1930 for numerous military barrack buildings and other defences installations throughout the country. The large volume of work Murdoch produced, together with their differing functional requirements, are the primary reasons for omitting this area from the thesis. This part of Murdoch's career could be the subject of a separate future study. The core material in this thesis, however, examines the substantial architectural developments of his career which had an impact on his colleagues and in some instances, on architects in private practice.

⁵⁰ Span and Neale termed Murdoch's development of this style "Early Commonwealth Vernacular" in 'RAAF Point Cook Heritage Study', Australian Construction Services, Melbourne, 1985.