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New Zealand Architects and Australia's Federation Architecture

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ABSTRACT

In 1887, Thomas Searell (1855-1938), Percival Selwyn Richards (1865-1952) and William Allen Tombs (1866-1928), architects trained in Christchurch, New Zealand, migrated to Melbourne, Victoria. A few years later they spread out to regional Victoria and Tasmania consolidating practices in the early 1900s in Ballarat (Richards), Geelong (Tombs), Hobart and Launceston (Searell). In those locations they became prominent practitioners, proficient in design discourses at the turn of the twentieth century which are now described in Australia as "Federation" architecture – a term that aligns design with the political realisation of Australia as a nation in1901. Yet the maintenance of personal connections and commonalities in their Australian buildings might be traced to the New Zealand architectural practice of Frederick Strouts who articled Searell in the 1870s and Richards in the early 1880s, and whose one-time assistant, Thomas Stoddart Lambert (1842-1917), articled Tombs in the early 1880s. At stake in this article, then, is the role of a larger region in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Australian architecture. As such, the work of these regional NewZealand/Australian architects serve as a reminder of the limitations of nationalist frameworks that define our region's architectural histories captured in stylistic terminology such as "Federation."

Introduction

This article concerns an interconnected group of New Zealand-trained architects, who established practices in Australia at the turn of the twentieth century, corresponding with the period in which the Australian colonies federated to form the Australian nation in 1901. At the heart of the discussion is the problem of historiographic nationalism. Two of these architects, Thomas Searell (1855–1938) and Percival Selwyn Richards (1865–1952) were trained in the Christchurch architectural practice of Frederick

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Strouts, and William Allen Tombs (1866–1928) was trained in the office of Strouts' one-time assistant Thomas Lambert. In 1887, all three migrated to Melbourne, subsequently dispersing to Hobart, Ballarat and Geelong, respectively, and Searell later relocated to Launceston and eventually returned to Christchurch intending to re-establish an architectural practice in New Zealand in the early 1920s. In those Australian locations they established architectural partnerships and practices, as well as their architectural reputations, realising a range of civic and residential buildings today associated with the period of Australia's beginning as a nation. Such projects have been described as "Federation" architecture, a stylistic term that was coined in late-twentieth-century. At stake in this article is a tension between region and nation captured in the architectural training and careers spanning New Zealand and Australia, and historiographic treatment of these architects and their buildings.

Searell, Richard and Tombs have been identified by locally-based historians as part of the project of describing Federation architecture, a purportedly distinctive period and/or style of building first introduced into Australia's stylistic lexicon by the art historian Bernard Smith in 1969. Smith initially proposed the term in a review of JM Freeland's seminal history of Australian architecture, *Architecture in Australia* (1968) challenging Freeland's use of the English stylistic term Queen Anne to describe picturesque red brick domestic architecture in Australia prevailing in the 1890s and 1900s before the First World War.[1] Smith rightly argued that such buildings in Australia were different from the popular Queen Anne revival in England from the 1870s and even more so from the original style of buildings associated with Queen Anne in the early eighteenth century, and therefore demanded a different name. Adhering to an art historical tradition of connecting work to its historical moment, and observing nationalist political, cultural and architectural discourse of the period, Smith substituted an English monarchical term with an Australian national term: Federation. Bernard and Kate Smith advanced the proposition to encompassing civic buildings of the period, in their book *Architectural Character of Glebe* (1973), reaching beyond the arguably more coherent corpus of distinctive domestic design.[2] From these formulations, the term is typically understood to encapsulate buildings that combine elements from a variety of stylistic traditions. They includes historical styles, typically identified by historians via nationalist terms, for example, English Domestic revival, English Queen Anne revival (or English Free style), Scottish Baronial, French Second Empire and American Romanesque, as well as new styles, for example Art Nouveau), all undercut by principles of the English Arts and Crafts movement in terms of materiality and tendencies towards abstraction especially in civic buildings. Despite, or perhaps because of the underlying complexity, appeal of the local term soon took

hold.[3] The work of Searell, Richards and Tombs has then come to light as historians sought to understand variations within an essentially eclectic idiom as interpreted in different contexts across Australia, further strengthening the relationship between nation and style, and at a time – in the late 1980s – corresponding with the bi-centenary of Britain's colonisation of the Australian landmasses.

Of these three architects, Richards has been the subject of most scrutiny in a doctoral thesis and associated articles by Gay Sweely whose research employed a combination of archival and oral history methods to render a prosopographical study of Richards' career and the practices with which he was associated, extending from the early 1880s in Christchurch, via Melbourne, to the late 1930s in Ballarat.[4] Sweely has argued Richards as "Ballarat's premier Federation architect" observing his capacity to work across the prevailing free style idioms of the period and exemplified in residential designs and eclectic free style commercial and institutional work including the Camp and Provincial hotels (1907 and 1909–10, respectively).[5] The work of Tombs and Searell has appeared in localised architectural studies, filtering through to passing reference in the case of Tombs (and in association with Robert Haddon), in the Victorian chapter of Trevor Howell's edited volume *Towards the Dawn: Federation Architecture in Australia 1890–1915*.[6] Tombs' architectural output, comprising residential and commercial buildings, via his Geelong-based partnerships including Blake & Tombs (1891–93), Watts, Tombs & Durran (1893–95) and Tombs & Durran (1895–1912) all servicing Geelong and Victoria's Western Districts, is otherwise recorded in various studies of Geelong architecture and heritage.[7] Appraisal of design capability is detectable in the featuring of Blake & Tombs' (former) Corio Chambers (1891–93) as an exemplar of a "Federation Anglo-Dutch" style proposed in Apperly, Irving and Reynolds' *Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture* (1989) though at the time its designers were "unknown" to the authors.[8] While the intricacies of the taxonomic system developed by Apperly, Irving and Reynolds has been subject to disciplinary criticism, it is nonetheless employed particularly in the field of heritage assessment, with Blake & Tombs' work contributing to related interpretation.[9] Possibly because of the smaller pool of architects in Tasmania, Searell has gained a greater historiographic profile. He features prominently in the Tasmanian chapter in *Towards the Dawn* largely on account of his design for the house Lemana in Launceston (1906) which is described as showing a breadth of forms with differing stylistic lineages with "the most flamboyant decorative appendages of all Tasmanian Federation structures."[10] As such, Searell is positioned as one of that state's key Federation-era architects, an assessment that afforded him an entry in the *Encyclopedia of Australian Architecture* securing him a place within an Australian canon.[11] But not before Johnathan Mané in

New Zealand noticed Searell's profile in *Towards the Dawn* and cited Lemana as a legacy, via Thomas Searell, of Frederick Strouts and, hence, architecture in New Zealand.[12]

Australian or Australasian Architecture?

The coining and use of the term Federation has not been without contention in relation to its stylistic coherence and nationalist implications. In 1999, the architectural historian Conrad Hamann invoked the idea of a "Federation Agreement" to describe a design reform agenda coloured by nationalist intent of the time.[13] In 2000, Julie Willis and Philip Goad, in an examination of the coining of the term, affirmed the value of stylistic nomenclature that situates Australian architecture within a geographic, cultural and political milieu, but questioned the idea of a style and, rather, proposed an understanding of Federation architecture as an assimilative design ethos encompassing a variety of visual vocabularies operating across building types and scales.[14] They also issued two cautions: firstly, that the design sensibility that it describes is not exclusive to Australia and, secondly, on the question of nationalist intent, that architectural historians be alert to the term's implied "cultural and political independence from Empire" counter to a strengthening of imperial ties at the time of political federation in 1901.[15] The question of what might be obscured by the new term has also been raised in Harriet Edquist's *Pioneers of Modernism: the Arts and Crafts Movement in Australia* (2008) which argues that the overarching nature of the (by then, popular) term has suppressed intellectual currents within it, notably the Arts and Crafts movement and its role in the development of early modernism in Australia.[16] Similar observations might be made in relation to the regional ties in the late nineteenth century.

In their book *Remaking the Tasman World* Philippa Mein Smith, Peter Hempenstall and Shaun Goldfinch advocate the idea of a Tasman World comprising a working region linked by trans-Tasman traffic, established following Britain's colonisation of Gadigal lands (Sydney) in 1788 and, from there, the subsequent occupation of Australian and New Zealand landmasses.[17] Mein Smith and Hempenstall draw attention to the European term "Australasia," coined by the French and adopted by the English in the mid-1700s, to describe the imagined landmass and region south of Asia. With reference to cartographic records, they note how the geography captured by the term shifts over time and by the late nineteenth century Australasia referred to a sphere of British influence encompassing the colonies of Australia, New Zealand, Fiji (under British rule from 1874 to 1970), and Papua (constituted as a British protectorate in 1884, annexed in 1888).[18] Indeed, the initial conferences on federation in the region included

Fiji, and New Zealand was invited to join but declined on account of differing cultural identities, trade connections and First Nations relationships.[19] As discussed by Mein Smith and Hempenstall, with the ultimate federation of the Australian colonies only, the idea of Australasia lost currency although the traffic between the colonies and subsequent nations intensified. They refer to Donald Denoon's idea of "Australasia" as a "repressed memory" which historians have "air-brushed out of both Australian and New Zealand historiographies."[20] A closer look at a particular aspect of the architectural historiography of the period reveals how this might happen.

When Bernard Smith argued for the acceptance of a Federation style, he connected the proposition to a discourse calling for an Australian style of architecture in the late 1880s and early 1890s:

> [p]erhaps it is time that we began to take that debate seriously; because it is just possible they succeeded in producing what they had set their minds to; a style, that is to say, with characteristics as marked and definable as any domestic style within the tradition of western architecture.[21]

As noted by Willis and Goad, although often regarded as a prelude to Federation, the series of articles on the topic of an "Australian" style were likely a celebration of one hundred years of European occupation in the region.[22] With thinking traceable to the contemporary European theorists including John Ruskin and E.E. Viollet-le Duc, the articles variously advocated a performative evaluation of typological, constructional and aesthetic attributes of multiple European stylistic traditions to determine elements suitable to environmental, cultural and social condition of the colonies in Australia and Australasia. For the most part, propositions were advocating rational progressive eclecticism. All were published in the Sydney-based *Australasian Builders and Contractors' News* (*ABCN*) – a masthead which projected a regional sphere of influence via the use of the regional term Australasia. John Sulman, James Green and E. Wilson Dobbs furnished articles for the masthead titled "An Australian style" (1887), "An Australian Style of Architecture" (1890) and again "An Australian Style of Architecture" (1891), respectively. However, James Izett used the title "Australasian Architecture" (1890) and took a wider view, referring to the colonies of the region, generally, and making direct reference to New Zealand via comments on the city of Christchurch.[23] Slippage between these geographic terms is then revealed in E. Wilson Dobbs' serialised history titled the "Rise and Growth of Australasian Architecture" published in the *ABCN* in 1892. In describing the varied climatic conditions of "Australia" Dobbs referred to the "fifth continent" and freely roved across the major landmasses encircling the Tasman Sea including continental Australia, Tasmania and New Zealand.[24] Irrespective of the term used –

Australia or Australasia – the geography entertained within the discourse appears to be a region of empire, understood historically and in the present, rather than a future nation.

Across the Tasman, a more complex impression of the region and prospects of localised architectural development is given in an article by Samuel Hurst Seager, a prominent Christchurch-trained and -based architect writing for the *RIBA Journal* on the topic of "Art and Architecture in New Zealand" in 1900. Lamenting the development of a distinctive domestic architectural tradition, Seager, identified the mobility of colonial populations and institutional and commercial infrastructure that coalesced Australasia, and comprising buildings of a "palatial and enduring character," as a counter force.

> Entering upon colonial life is an experiment which may or may not succeed, so that behind any effort to make a home there has been the feeling that the anchor must not be too firmly cast. If the experiment fails in one colony or province there must be freedom to move to another … In addition to these feelings which have influenced domestic architecture of the early settlers there is the fact that the larger proportion of the population is a moving one than is the case in older countries. All the banks, insurance, shipping and mercantile companies, together with Government, have offices of equal importance in the four principal centres – Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin – and in some cases in the Australian colonies; any one of the officers is liable at any moment to be asked to undertake duties in a fresh centre.[25]

Previous architectural history scholarship within this region has examined various forms of architectural exchange between Australia and New Zealand prior to the constitution of national formations on either side of the Tasman Sea, most recently, the special issue of *Fabrications* on "The Architecture of the Tasman World, 1788–1850" co-edited by G. A. Bremner and Andrew Leach, examining the architectures of early colonial resources and enterprises that contributed to colonising and coalescing the region.[26] Prominent nineteenth century architects and buildings, notably the Ambrose Hallen-John Verge Treaty House (as it is now called) prefabricated in Sydney and erected for the British Resident in Waitangi, New Zealand, are also primary markers within the region's national architectural histories, though mainly with Australian architects and practice in the role of influencer. The well documented career of the Tasmanian-born, British-trained, New Zealand government Colonial Architect (1869–1877), William Clayton is another well-known case in point.[27] However, Julie Willis has revealed more complex contours of professional migration connecting the architecture cultures of the Australian and New Zealand colonies during the later nineteenth century as architects moved back, forth and beyond to other British colonies and concessions.[28] In the various forms, such movements involving Australia and New Zealand were important in maintaining the region within the professional purview of architectural discourse and

professional practice. This article addresses those contexts and relationships at the time corresponding to the formulation and federation of Australia (1901) and the granting of Dominion status in New Zealand (1907). It works across a variety of primary and secondary sources to bring together professional biographies for Searell, Richards and Tombs and demonstrate the interconnectedness of locations within the region. In demonstrating New Zealand's influence in Australian architecture at the turn of the twentieth century, it aims to reveal regional complexities underscoring Australia's first national historiographic term. To begin, it introduces the sources of this trans-Tasman network, the Christchurch-based architectural practices of Frederick Strouts and Thomas Lambert.

Architectural Practice in Christchurch, New Zealand

Migrating from England to New Zealand and arriving in Christchurch May 1859 with professional training and experience in architecture and building surveying, Frederick Strouts (1834–1919) quickly established a business as an "Architect, Surveyor & Land Agent."[29] The context that his practice later offered his articled students from the 1870s is relevant to this wider discussion as it engaged the fostering of the trans-colonial connections upon which the nineteenth-century idea of Australasia as a region of Empire was built and maintained. By the mid-1860s, Strouts and his business partner James Hawkes, were acquiring substantial commissions for homesteads among the region's major colonial landholders as well as urban commercial buildings. Chief among them was the commission for a branch for the Bank of Australasia in Christchurch (1863–64), commissioned as part of the establishment of a trans-colonial and trans-Tasman financial infrastructure comprising branches built across the Australian colonies from the 1830s and New Zealand in the 1860s. Operation within this extended colonial context also entailed action to foster the professionalisation of the local architectural practice. In 1864, Strouts co-signed a letter to the British architect George Gilbert Scott advocating the appointment of Christchurch-based architect Benjamin Mountford as supervising architect for Scott's design of the Christchurch Cathedral and opposing the appointment and deployment of an English architect, a move that was seen to undermine confidence in local architects.[30]

In 1868, Strouts returned to England, staying for a period of eighteen months, to some extent advancing a professional agenda. He strengthened professional associations and status, gaining an associate membership of the Royal Institute of British Architects. During this time, he would have gained direct exposure to shifting architectural discourses in England, including the emergence of the eclectic red-brick Queen Anne revival and Arts and Crafts movement. Strouts returned to Christchurch in 1869, consolidating his

architectural practice and professional practice context co-founding the Canterbury Association of Architects, the first professional organisation of its kind in New Zealand (established, 1871).[31]

As Strouts built his practice he employed various articled pupils including Thomas Searell (articled and employed, 1871 to c.1880), and later, Percival Richards (1881–1887), Robert Ballantyne (1883–1887, and subsequently a practice partner from 1893–1899) as well as (but beyond the scope of this article), his most accomplished and well-known pupil and architect, Cecil Woods (articled from 1893), effectively training them in an eclectic design method as his office deployed various stylistic vocabularies for projects catering to different institutions and entities. In 1871, when Searell was articled, Strouts was appointed supervising architect for William FitzJohn Crisp's design for the Anglican pro-cathedral Church of St Michael and All Angels, Christchurch, which interpreted Gothic architecture in timber, as part of a broader range of ecclesiastical and public buildings in New Zealand dealing with the contingencies of place and questions of identity.[32] In 1878, while Thomas Searell was developing his professional expertise in Strouts' office, they realised the School of Agriculture, Lincoln (Ivey Hall) combining different stylistic elements typically described in terms of their European national or cultural origins – English, French and Flemish – described by the historians of New Zealand architecture John Stacpoole as "oddly eclectic," and Peter Shaw as Neo-Elizabethan[33] (Fig. 1).

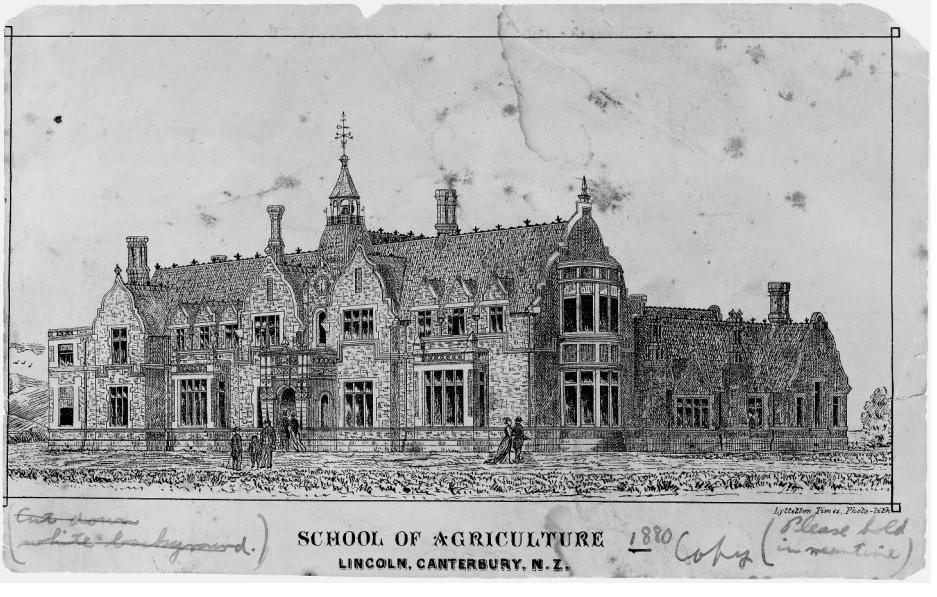

Figure 1. School of Agriculture, Lincoln, Canterbury, New Zealand (1880) designed by Frederick Strouts c1878. Source: Canterbury Journal, vol 4 (1880). Lincoln University Living Heritage: Tikaka Tuku Iho. https://livingheritage.lincoln.ac.nz/ nodes/view/31265 .

Keeping abreast of broader eclectic discourses in design, in the 1880s, and corresponding with the articles of Percival Richards and Robert Ballantyne, Strouts' office adopted a mode of design akin to the work of English architects associated with the English Queen Anne revival practiced by English architects such as Richard Norman Shaw, seen in the brick Rhodes Memorial Convalescent Home, Christchurch (1885).

The aesthetic trajectory of Strouts' practice follows the broad currents of late nineteenth-century design, which are understood to have coalesced in Australia's eclectic and free style Federation-era buildings across the Tasman. They also include the English domestic revival associated with the Arts and Crafts movement via various means of transmission. In 1885 Strouts was commissioned to supervise the construction of an expansive bungalow Riseholme designed by the English architect Robert Briggs, employing a picturesque combination of English Domestic Revival elements and details for construction in timber. New Zealand art historian, Johnathan Mané, argues Riseholme influenced subsequent work by the office, notably, the timber Strowan mansion (1890).[34] In the late 1890s, following the departure of Strouts' former students – Searell, Richards and Ballantyne – to Melbourne, Ballantyne returned to Christchurch with five years of Australian practice experience, and the former teacher and pupil entered into a partnership. In 1897, Strouts & Ballantyne produced the eclectic or free-style Hyman Marks wing of the Christchurch Hospital constructed in red brick with stone banding, terracotta infill panels and timber verandahs. On Australian soil, the free style visual and material expression of the Hyman Marks wing would most likely receive a Federation label to describe its style.

The other figure within this interconnected group of architects in Christchurch was Thomas Lambert (1842–1917), a Scottish-born and trained architect who migrated to New Zealand in 1866 and was employed as a draughtsman in Strouts' office for three years from around 1874 to 1876, overlapping with Thomas Searell, before establishing his own practice in Christchurch in 1877, operating through to 1893 when he relocated to Dunedin and then Wellington.[35] Lambert designed in an up-to-date eclectic mode demonstrating interest in Shavian materiality with visual and textural effect seen in various schools, churches, civic and commercial buildings, including the strikingly polychromatic Italian Romanesque Beth El Synagogue (1881, dem.) and poly-textured Italianate YMCA Building (1884). During this same period of the early 1880s, Lambert articled two students, Edward McCallum Blake (1865–1929) and William Allen Tombs, the latter a close friend of Percival Richards who was articled in Strouts' office at the same time.[36] As will be discussed shortly, Tombs and Richards migrated to Melbourne together and maintained contact in subsequent decades, and Tombs and Blake formed an architectural partnership in Geelong, operating from c.1891 to 1893.

Trans-Tasman Trajectories

The trans-Tasman migrations of this group of architects were motivated by personal and economic circumstances. Thomas Searell appears to have departed Strouts' office in 1880, seeking an independent practice.[37] He tendered various residential and small civic buildings around the Canterbury Plains, though based on newspaper tender notices commissions were scarce and in September 1881 he was declared insolvent.[38] Personal circumstances may have prompted Searell's next moves. In 1883 Searell married and in 1884 the couple had their first child and relocated to Auckland.[39] In Auckland, Searell advertised tenders for a variety of residential and commercial projects as well as advertising classes in architectural drawing (later competition entries suggest that he was a talented architectural delineator). However, Searell's tender advertisements suggest that larger projects eluded the architect, especially as New Zealand's colonial economy entered a period of depression in the late 1880s. Where the opportunity did arise, he employed an eclectic design method which he maintained throughout his later career. And though commentary on these projects is sparse it also reveals the ambiguities associated with stylistic interpretation allied to purported national design traditions. In 1886, an unbuilt design by Searell for the Governor Browne Hotel in Auckland, was described by the *New Zealand Herald* as designed in an English Renaissance style but with mansard roofs which suggests French Renaissance elements, whether or not filtered through subsequent work popular throughout the Anglophone World from the 1850s.[40] Meanwhile the *Auckland Star* described the mansard roofs as three minarets, prompting a correction from Searell.[41] However, in the following months the hotel's proprietors bankrupted and Searell's design was shelved.[42] At around the same time Searell produced a speculative design for a town hall in Parnell (central Auckland), though without a site on which to build, and amid worsening economic conditions, Searell's design wasn't realised.[43] His last advertised tender in Auckland was for a brick villa in May 1887. His next, a year later, was in Melbourne, where a speculative land boom was generating dramatically different economic conditions.[44]

In Melbourne, Searell established an independent suburban practice in North Fitzroy. The scope of that practice is difficult to ascertain, with a few advertised tenders for villa residences and shops in the two years 1888 and 1889. In parallel, he consolidated his professional standing, being elected a member of the Society of Arts (England) in 1888 and fellow of the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects in 1891.[45] Searell also sought commissions via competition and a collage of design drawings, including unrealised competitive designs, published in the *Cyclopedia of Tasmania* in 1901 indicate the extension of an eclectic design method engaging contemporary stylistic vocabularies, as well as skill in rendering.[46] Searell's designs for what appears to be the Central Fire Brigade Station, Melbourne (competition in 1892) and National Mutual Life Association

building (competition in 1889) are both projected as eclectic large-scale red-brick structures with stone dressings achieving strong visual effects for a competitive urban environment.

In parallel domestic designs, Searell engaged the precepts of the Arts and Crafts movement. Notably, he designed a villa for the Melbourne suburb of Ascot Vale, published in the *ABCN* demonstrating some currency in planning, form- and space-making[47] (Fig. 2). The asymmetrical plan was arranged around an outer and an inner central hall giving access to three reception rooms. The inner hall was designed as a square room with arches spanning the corners to create an octagonal space to be lit from above, and with plants to fill the angles of space. The external form conveyed a vernacular character of modest scale, with low slung hipped roofs stretching out to encompass verandahs and sunhoods indicating response to the contingencies of the Australian environment aligning with the debate in the architectural press about the idea of an Australian style. Without historicist references such as half timbering, the building relied on its materiality for expression: red bricks with black pointing, white dressings and green slates. The combination of the hipped roof with picturesque punctuations suggests potential influence from Melbourne contemporaries, notably Beverley Ussher and Henry Kemp, but the scale is more modest suggesting applicability to a wider market.[48] Before too long some professional recognition of his design skill came in winning the competition for the Hobart International Exhibition building (1892) with a design which embodies some kinship with the Renaissance Revival vocabulary of Reed & Barnes' Melbourne Exhibition building (1880) though at a smaller scale[49] (Fig. 3). In 1893, Searell relocated to Hobart to supervise construction of his exhibition building design.

Figure 2. "Proposed Villa for Ascot Vale" (1892) designed by Thomas Searell. *Australasian Builders and Contractors News*, 2 April 1892, 253.

Figure 3. Design for Hobart Exhibition Building, Hobart (1892), designed by Thomas Searell. *Building and Engineering Journal*, 20 January 1894, 21.

New Zealand's economic downturn in the late 1880s also saw both Percival Richards and William Tombs lose employment and relocate, together, to Melbourne where they gained employment with two newly independent practitioners – John Beswicke (1847–1925) and Charles d'Ebro (1850–1920) – whose trajectories arguably mark a generational shift within Melbourne's architectural profession catalysed by the economic boom. Roughly one generation older than Richards and Tombs, both practitioners were producing individualistic designs based on contemporary architectural vocabularies, which would have offered an extension of the design sensibilities already learnt by Richards and Tombs in Christchurch.

Richards gained employment with Melbourne-born and trained architect John Beswicke, who had recently embarked on sole practice in 1887 after more than 20 years' experience with prolific Melbourne practice Crouch & Wilson (1864–81) and a subsequent partnership with Wilson (1881–86). During Richards' employment through to 1893, Beswicke entered and left short-term partnerships with Edward Hutchins (Beswicke & Hutchins, 1889–90) and Francis Coote, another New Zealander, (Beswicke & Coote, 1890–93). The practice during those years was allied to Melbourne's suburban expansion and the commercial consolidation of the colonial city's central grid, notably involved in the design of Melbourne's tallest building through to 1930s, the Australian Prudential and Investment Company building (1889, dem.) realised in association with Oakden Addison & Kemp (design credited to Henry Kemp). But with

the collapse of the Victorian colonial economy in 1893, Beswicke ended his partnership with Coote, and Richards lost his employment.

Tombs was employed by Charles d'Ebro who had completed an articles in civil engineering in England before emigrating to South Australia for a position with the South Australian Railways in 1876.[50] In 1880, he relocated to Melbourne, forming a partnership with the architect-engineer John Grainger, and the practice was soon winning competitions and gaining commissions across the colonies of the region, including the Auckland Free Public Library and Municipal Offices (1884–7) in New Zealand. The partnership was dissolved in 1885 and d'Ebro embarked on sole practice and was gaining substantial commissions at around the time Tombs arrived in Melbourne. However, like many of his contemporaries, Tombs may have sought independent practice while buoyant economic conditions were prevailing, and within two years he had relocated to Geelong in 1889.[51]

By 1893, Searell, Richards and Tombs were dispersing. Searell, aged 37 years, had completed his articles and acquired some fifteen years of professional experience in Christchurch, Auckland and Melbourne, before moving onto Hobart pursuing sole practice. Tombs and Richards, aged 26 and 27 respectively, had completed their articles in Christchurch and gained professional experience with a rising generation of progressive architects in Melbourne. Tombs had moved to Geelong, possibly drawn by his former Christchurch colleague, Edward MacCallum Blake. With the economic bust of 1892–93, Richards lost his position with John Beswicke and relocated to Ballarat for employment in the practice of William Brazenor.[52] It is impossible to know the extent to which they discussed their plans, if at all, but it is known that Richards and Tombs, at least, maintained contact though to 1912.[53] It can also be observed that all three resisted long distance moves to alternative boom contexts, notably Western Australia, that had lured so many architects in favour of nearby regional practice variously via sole practice, partnership and employment.

William Tombs in Geelong

The first to leave Melbourne, Tombs departed d'Ebro's practice for Geelong in 1889, where New Zealand connections provided a pathway to an architectural partnership. By 1891 Tombs was in partnership with Edward MacCallum Blake, who he'd trained and worked with in the office of Thomas Lambert in Christchurch.[54] Blake had spent the intervening years traversing the Tasman: Christchurch to Sydney to Christchurch to Melbourne and Geelong.[55] In Geelong, he was architect for early buildings for the newly established Gordon Technical College, for trades teaching (1890) and administration (1891), the latter designed and built in red brick with contrasting Italianate details in cement responding to a slightly earlier adjoining building in the same mode.[56] A commercial project, known as Corio Chambers (1891), completed in parallel

Figure 4. Corio Chambers, Geelong (1891) designed by Blake & Tombs. Photograph by Flickr user Denisbin, 2020. CC BY-ND 2.0 Deed.

was used to announce the formation of the Blake & Tombs partnership, alongside high praise for the architecture "in strict conformity with the Queen Anne style"[57] (Fig. 4).

Blake & Tombs advertised a steady stream of residential and commercial tenders across 1891 and 1892, and the practice established an office in the town of Colac to service the pastoral communities and enterprises of Victoria's Western District.[58] Reportage suggests a progressive edge to the work of the partnership engaged in Australian or Australasian architectural discourse, at roughly the same time (within 12 months) Thomas Searell designed his published villa for Ascot Vale. Blake & Tombs' villa residence for Mrs F.M. Moore (1891) was described in the local press as being "after the American style of building," and effectively realised James Green's proposition for the adaptation of American Shingle Style prototypes to the Australian environment in his essay on "An Australian Style of Architecture" published in the *ABCN* a year earlier in 1890.[59] However, Blake soon returned across the Tasman and was appointed architect for the South Canterbury Education Board, later the New Zealand Public Works Department, and subsequently in private practice.[60] Tombs stayed in Geelong joining the partnership of Watts & Durran, becoming Watts, Tombs & Durran.[61] Joseph Watts died shortly after in March 1893, suggesting that the new partnership constituted a succession plan.[62] James Durran (1861–1912) was a locally-born building contractor employed by Watts and later in partnership from 1891. Whist local studies identify James Durran as the senior partner of the new practice who

brought a client-base established by and with Joseph Watts, it is plausible that William Tombs brought design expertise formerly provided by Joseph Watts.[63]

From the late 1890s Tombs & Durran were designing a wide range of residential and commercial buildings with visual vocabularies largely derived from the late nineteenth century eclectic Queen Anne style, and understood, or at least represented, by the architects on those terms. For example, their competitive design for the Haimes Memorial (benevolent) Homes in Geelong (1896), which freely interprets formal and material vocabularies of the former style, was defended by the practice in the local press as of the "Queen Anne style of architecture . . . of no Jimcrack order."[64] Their subsequent commercial buildings in the 1900s and early 1910s increasingly simplified visual and material vocabularies – suggesting the interaction of Arts and Crafts movement precepts – alongside the introduction of contemporary Art Nouveau details. The trajectory is seen in the Macrow Furniture Arcade (1911) and Scott Hamilton Company Building (1911), ultimately arriving at the smoothly striated Solomon building (1912), the practice's largest commercial building (Fig. 5). However, in 1912 James Durran was killed in a vehicular accident and Tombs ceased the practice, subsequently gaining employment with Geelong-based builders Hunt & Dunlop.[65] Tombs' partnerships and practice in Geelong were underpinned by overlapping regional connections, spanning Australia and New Zealand, including an ongoing personal connection with Percy Richards.[66]

Figure 5. Solomon's Building in Moorabool Street, Geelong (1909) designed by Tombs & Durran. Museums Victoria Collections. https://collections.museumsvictoria.com.au/items/771099.

Percival Richards in Ballarat

Percival Richards' relocation to Ballarat in 1893 entailed a different pathway to professional maturation within the established architectural practice of William Brazenor, undertaking a wide range of infrastructural, institutional, commercial and residential projects. As observable in documentation by Gay Sweely, a variety of styles were deployed, all adhering to prevailing conventions.[67] When Brazenor retired in 1901 Richards inherited Brazenor's clientele enabling him to practice on his own, working through until 1946.[68]

Whereas the continuum of Tombs' work (in various partnerships) suggests the adaptation of an architectural vocabulary encountered at the outset in the early 1890s, Richards' independent practice from the early 1900s indicates the maintenance of an eclectic sensibility as he assimilated changing design vocabularies. This aspect of Richards' design practice connects with the work of Thomas Searell, the two them trained in Strouts' office. Richards' residential designs were based on functional, asymmetrical plans realised in bungalow forms under hipped and gabled roofs punctuated with distinctive and individualised domed towers and infused with an Arts and Crafts orientation in terms materiality and detailing, including some references to Australian flora and fauna. Echoing the work of more well-known architects of the time, these houses firmly align with the historiographic ideal of a Federation style observable at the turn of the twentieth century. In 1905, the *Ballarat Star* reported a marked advance in the architecture of Ballarat via Richards' which it characterised as comprising "modern designs."[69] The most elaborate and eclectic of these was the house Dumbarton, Ballarat (1909) in which gabled domestic forms were in play with an Ionic colonnaded verandah and a corner tower as crowned by a classical parapet and ogee domed lantern, showing an expressive accumulation of readable elements.

For a select commercial and institutional designs prior to the First World War, eclecticism was mediated by free style interpretation, demonstrating responsiveness to physical contexts and institutional associations. Richards' design for the Irwin's Warehouse (1903), a large commercial structure, was classical employing superimposed Mannerist bays to articulate the three-storey façade. The same client then commissioned him to design the Camp Hotel, Ballarat (1907), which was realised in a Free style Arts and Crafts idiom comprising a three-part façade striated in bands of brick and render and superimposed with Art Nouveau detailing. This rejection of historicist style in a commercial context echoes the attitudes and designs of contemporaries such as Robert Haddon with Sydney Smith & Ogg in Melbourne and Tombs & Durran in Geelong. Motifs from the Camp Hotel were then elaborated in the large-scale, asymmetrically composed Provincial Hotel in

Figure 6. Provincial Hotel, Ballarat (1909) designed by Percival Richard. Photograph by Mattinbgn, CC by 3.0 <https://creativecommons.Org/licenses/by/3.0>, via Wikimedia Commons.

Ballarat (1909), arranged in response to its corner location. In this design, a wide range of contemporary stylistic elements in circulation at the time are deployed with graphic treatment of materials (Fig. 6). However, for institutional work, recognisable stylistic associations remained allied to institutional histories and contexts. For example, Richards' competitive design for Ballarat College (1911) was based on the interpretation of Gothic and Romanesque forms and elements, evoking a collegiate culture. For additions of the Ballarat Benevolent Asylum in the 1910s, Richards likewise interpreted medieval traditions, in this instance, responding to the existing fabric of the Asylum designed in a Gothic or Elizabethan style by Christopher Porter in the 1860s. Of these three architects, Richards maintained the longest Australian-based practice, sustained until his retirement in 1946 and carried on by his architect son, Geoffrey Richards, until 1965.

Thomas Searell in Tasmania

In Hobart and without a locally-based partner, Searell encountered a microcosm of the period's and the region's mobile architectural profession. Despite the positive reception for his design of his Hobart Exhibition building, which was lauded upon its design, as well as at its opening in 1894 and closing a year later, he was out competed for major commissions by architects who'd migrated to Hobart in the 1880s and established

architectural partnerships and practices coalescing in what appears to have been a close-knit professional community.[70] Arguably, the stiffest design competition came from Alan Walker (1864–1931), who was Hobart-born and trained by Henry Hunter, travelled to London to study at University College, and had reputedly assisted in the recording of buildings for Bannister Fletcher's *History of Architecture on the Comparative Method*.[71] Gaining first-hand knowledge of historical source material and contemporary English Domestic Revival and Arts and Crafts principles in England, Walker was admitted as an associate of the Royal Institute of British Architects, before returning to Melbourne in 1888 and undertaking work in Tasmania from c.1892. He relocated to Hobart in 1895 (after Searell) and rapidly gained residential, commercial and ecclesiastical commissions. Walker's skills as a delineator – skills Searell also possessed – made him formidable in competition. The order of merit for entries in the design competition for the Hobart General Post office is telling: 1. Alan Walker; 2. Department of Public Works; 3. Alan Walker; 4. Thomas Searell; 5. Alexander North; 6. Alan Walker; 7. Thomas Searell; 8. Thomas Searell.[72] In the absence of drawings it can be observed that both Walker and Searell invested in gaining the commission and were able to provide multiple interpretations of the brief. Walker prevailed with Edwardian Baroque classicism as built.

In the absence of larger commissions, Searell sustained himself in Hobart for a period on suburban housing and sporadic public and commercial commissions by establishing relationships with developers and builders and occasional competitive wins. Between 1894 and 1896 he designed houses for a suburban development in Hobart, by drawing a modest array of elements from his earlier design for the villa in Ascot Vale.[73] There were sporadic larger commissions such as the classical New Town town hall in suburban Hobart (1897) and the free style Gaiety Theatre, Zeehan (1898), but without a steady stream of projects, and failed ventures in real estate speculation, Searell bankrupted in 1901.[74] Within a few years he had relocated and re-established himself in architectural practice in Launceston in 1906 with the design of the villa Lemana, a re-iteration of his Ascot Vale villa design, replete with the top-lit octagonal hall as reported in 1892 (Fig. 7). However, in contrast to the relative simplicity of external forms seen in the earlier design in Melbourne, Lemana in Launceston is embellished with a wide variety of identifiable stylistic elements and motifs in circulation at the time, but that together defy classification. Externally and internally, they include details deriving from Classical, Islamic and vernacular traditions as well as contemporary Art Nouveau details. In parallel, the arrangement of the plan around a central hall and the creation of indoor-outdoor relationships, as well as an emphasis on material expression indicates the

Figure 7. Lemana, Launceston, Tasmania (1906) designed by Thomas Searell. Photograph by Stuart King.

maintenance of an Arts and Crafts orientation within Searell's design method. Though recorded as an exemplar of an Australian Federation architecture in Tasmania, Searell's story – training in an eclectic design method in Christchurch and the development of formal and spatial ideas in Melbourne, later to be resolved in Launceston – challenges the ideal of local specificity framed within a singular national imagining. Searell designed various other substantial villa residences in Launceston, employing related plan arrangements and material palettes, though stylistically less adventurous than Lemana. Larger commissions continued be sporadic and, in 1921, he returned to Christchurch with the intention of re-establishing an architectural practice in New Zealand.

Conclusion

This examination of east to west migration, from New Zealand to Australia, and its consequences in multiple Australian localities also presents a counter narrative to more dominant influences of Australian architects operating in New Zealand. The architectural careers of William Tombs, Percy Richards and Thomas Searell from Christchurch and

variously touching down in Auckland, Melbourne, Geelong, Ballarat, Hobart and Launceston present an insight into the dynamics of professional trans-Tasman migrations at the turn of the twentieth century. Migrations across and within colonies were triggered by the waxing and waning of colonial economies within the region, and opportunities such as employment, potential partnerships, and competition wins. Within this interconnected group, the role of personal and professional relationships established early in their careers in Christchurch as well as in Australia supported their practice, revealing the implications of a wider Australasian geography on architectural practice in different locations and against the grain of bifurcating national imaginings and historiographies.

The designs of Tombs, Richards and Searell for Melbourne, Geelong, Ballarat, Hobart and Launceston – unbuilt as well as built – show proficiency within what is now commonly understood as an Australian Federation design idiom or style, and are included in volumes that have attempted to describe this style's attributes and variations. On one hand, these regional exemplars can be seen to support Conrad Harman's proposition of a pervasive "Federation Agreement" aiming to reform architecture for an Australian nation.[75] On the other hand, they reveal the fragility of the retrospectively applied term "Federation," laden as it is with Australian nationalist sentiment. While the motivations of these architects are unknown, their movements and experiences giving rise to these buildings don't map so easily onto the idea of Australia as it was circumscribed by political federation in 1901. These buildings actually embody a bigger regional imagining of Australia at the turn of the twentieth century caught in a legacy of historiographic nationalism.

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