

One Hundred Years of Architectural Education in Queensland

This year marks one hundred years since the establishment of a Diploma of Architecture in Queensland. The first offer of architecture related subjects in Brisbane occurred at suburban Technical Colleges, some of which were eventually amalgamated to form the Brisbane Central Technical College. Formed out of Schools of Arts, and Mechanics' Institutes, Technical Colleges were the first educational institutions in the Australian context to offer architectural diplomas. The Sydney Technical College (1878–1949) offered a three-year part-time architectural diploma in 1890, and later the University of Sydney established the first Bachelor of Architecture program in Australia, under Leslie Wilkinson (1882–1973) in 1919.¹ In Brisbane, the North Brisbane School of Arts and Mechanics' Institute opened in 1849, and others followed across the State.² In 1881, at the Brisbane School of Arts, an “experiment in technical education” was undertaken. Artist Joseph Augustine Clarke (1844–1890), who had previously taught at the Bombay School of Design, provided Freehand and Artistic Drawing classes, while Danish architect Christian Waagepetersen (c. 1851–1884) taught Geometrical Drawing.³ These classes were run two nights a week to a group of over twenty students, mainly apprentices, intended as a forerunner to classes with more substantial architectural content; Construction and Architecture, Arithmetic and Mathematics, offered at the short-lived Technical School of Visual Art (1884–1898), incorporated into the Brisbane Technical College.⁴ Similarly, at the South Brisbane Technical College, architect Edward de Saluz Kretschmer (c. 1844–1915), taught the subjects Architecture, Building Construction, Engineering, Mensuration, Mechanism, Perspective, and General Knowledge in 1900.⁵

¹ “Sydney Technical College. Annual Presentation of Prizes,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, March 25, 1891, 5; “University of Sydney,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, December 3, 1918, 8.

² Eddie Clarke, *Technical and Further Education in Queensland: A History 1860–1990* (Brisbane: Department of Education, Queensland and Bureau of Employment, Vocational and Further Education and Training, Queensland, 1992): 4.

³ Details provided in “Death of Mr. J.A. Clarke,” *Brisbane Courier*, September 22, 1890, 6.

⁴ “Technical Education,” *Queenslander* (Brisbane), July 16, 1881, 64. Prominent Queensland architect A.B. Wilson attended these classes; see <http://www.wilsonarchitects.com.au/ab-wilson>, accessed September 2, 2012.

⁵ “South Brisbane Technical College,” *Brisbane Courier*, June 8, 1900, 2.



Brisbane Central Technical College Buildings at George Street
(1912)

Image Source: Records and Archives Management Services,
University of Queensland UQA S178 b2

After 1900, a population boom resulted in insufficient space for increasing student numbers.⁶ Though nominally private institutions, Technical Colleges received some funding from the State Government. As government involvement increased, technical education was absorbed into the Department of Public Instruction (1875–1957).⁷ Following the Technical Instruction Act of 1908, the Brisbane Technical College, South Brisbane Technical College, and West End Technical College were amalgamated in 1909 to become the Brisbane Central Technical College (CTC), the same year as the bill to establish the University of Queensland (UQ) passed through parliament.⁸ A campus plan for the CTC was developed that followed the prevailing American model for technical education, aligning main departments to a dedicated building, that opened in 1915.⁹ The decision to temporarily house UQ in Old

⁶ “Technical Education,” *Queenslander* (Brisbane), June 8, 1901, 1084.

⁷ “Technical Instruction Bill,” *Brisbane Courier*, September 6, 1907, 4.

⁸ Eddie Clarke, *Technical and Further Education in Queensland: A History 1860 – 1990* (Brisbane: Department of Education, Queensland and Bureau of Employment, Vocational and Further Education and Training, Queensland, 1992): 27; “University Bill,” *Brisbane Courier*, August 18, 1909, 4.

⁹ *Ibid.*; Frank Costello, “A History of the Courses of Study at the Central Technical College and the Queensland

Institute of Technology which led to the establishment of the School of the Built Environment at the Queensland Institute of Technology,” (Brisbane: Queensland Institute of Technology, School of the Built Environment, 1976. [Typed unpublished notes]), 2. Commercial School was assigned to A Block, the Administration and Examination Hall were located in B Block, the Art School in C Block, Domestic Science in D Block, Chemistry and Geology in E Block, Wool Classing and Building Construction in F Block, Physics and Electrical Engineering in G Block, Civil Engineering and Mechanical Engineering in H Block with workshops located in J Block.

Government House in 1911, saw it co-located among a cluster of educational institutions; namely, the CTC, Industrial High School, and Commercial High School.

Robert Percy Cummings (1900–1989), who would become the first appointed Lecturer in Architecture (1937), and later Foundation Professor (1949) at UQ, played a pivotal role across all aspects of local architectural culture over the arc of his career. He first pursued his architectural studies through evening classes at the CTC from 1916, while working as a draftsman for Brown and Broad Limited, saw millers and timber merchants, originally from Kilcoy, north of Brisbane.¹⁰ Cummings began his studies two years before the Diploma in Architecture, was established by Charles Ford Whitcombe (b. 1872),¹¹ at the CTC in 1918, following his appointment as Chief Instructor in Architecture and Building Construction in 1917.¹² After World War One, Cummings was employed for five years as a draftsman by the Commonwealth War Services Homes Commission, and was awarded his Diploma in Architecture in 1923.¹³ He was taught by the architect G.A. Osbaldiston (1893–1942), supervisor of his early work at J. and H.G. Kirkpatrick.¹⁴

In 1923, Cummings' year of graduation, subjects offered at the CTC within the Diploma in Architecture could be grouped into four broad categories; drawing, architectural history, construction, and architectural design. The curriculum was comprised of Perspective Drawing Stage One and Two, Geometrical Drawing Stage One and Two, History of Architecture Stage One and Two, Building Construction Stage One and Two, Specifications, and Architectural Design and Planning, remarkably, the only subject with design content. This curriculum melded subjects from the Art and Building Construction Departments **already** offered by the College,

¹⁰ Ian Sinnamon, "Cummings, Robert Percy (1900–1989)," *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 17 (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2007): 280–81.

¹¹ Where possible, dates have been provided for birth and death; however, this information has not always been located.

¹² Sinnamon, "Cummings, Robert Percy (1900–1989); Donald Watson, and Judith McKay, "Whitcombe, Charles Ford," *A Directory of Queensland Architects to 1940* (St Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Library, Fryer Memorial Library, Occasional Publication no. 5, 1984), 204.

¹³ "Technical Colleges: Examination Results. Successful Candidates," *Brisbane Courier*, January 18, 1923, 11.

¹⁴ Donald Watson, and Judith McKay, "Osbaldiston, George Albert," *A Directory of Queensland Architects to 1940* (St Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Library, Fryer Memorial Library, Occasional Publication no. 5, 1984), 149. Osbaldiston taught at the CTC between 1920 and 1924.

with the addition of Architectural History, Architectural Design and Planning, and Specifications.¹⁵

After completing his diploma, Cummings was awarded the second Queensland Wattle League scholarship in 1924, a “travelling arts scholarship,” designed to support young Queensland artists to further their studies overseas.¹⁶ The first recipient had been sculptor Daphne Mayo (1895–1982). The scholarship afforded Cummings three years of study at the Architectural Association (AA) in London, at a time when student interest in continental developments in Holland, Denmark and Sweden was being fuelled by journals such as *Architect and Building News* (1926–1968).¹⁷ The foundation of the Staatliches Bauhaus (1919–1925), in Weimar, Germany, with Walter Gropius (1883–1969) as director, and subsequent move to Dessau (1925–1932), roughly coincided with Cummings’ time in Europe.¹⁸ While at the AA, he was awarded the prestigious Rome Scholarship that allowed two years further study at the British School in Rome, before arrival back in Brisbane in December 1930.¹⁹ In 1931, after five years abroad, Cummings held an exhibition of architectural drawings, produced during his time away, at the Gainsborough Gallery (1928–1939) in Brisbane, owned by art dealer and Royal Queensland Art Society (RQAS) member Eliza Jeanette Sheldon (1885–1974),²⁰ prior to his appointment as Lecturer-in-Charge of Architecture and Building Construction at the CTC in 1934.

Despite a decade of recession exacerbated by the drought of the mid-1920s, prior to the Great Depression,²¹ student numbers at the college swelled to over 4,000.²² In 1935, the Queensland Chapter of the RAIA announced a “Model Homes” competition, and the Queensland Architectural Students Association (QASA) was

¹⁵ “Technical Colleges: Examination Results. Successful Candidates.” Cummings was one of six students who passed Architectural Design and Planning. The other students listed were D.M. Brennan, C.J. Virgo, H.G. Driver, W.G. Thain, and T.B.F. Gargett.

¹⁶ “Architecture,” *Brisbane Courier*, February 16, 1924, 8.

¹⁷ Andrew Higgott, *Mediating Modernism: Architectural Cultures in Britain* (London: Routledge, 2007), 23.

¹⁸ Andrew Saint, *Architect and Engineer: A Study in Sibling Rivalry* (New Haven [Conn.]; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 472–473.

¹⁹ “Personal,” *Brisbane Courier*, December 10, 1930, 15.

²⁰ “Art Exhibition,” *Brisbane Courier*, April 24, 1931, 16.

²¹ Evans, *A History of Queensland*, 181.

²² “Big Influx of Pupils. Valuable Training at Technical College,” *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), February 20, 1935, 18.

established.²³ Robert Cummings, then in his mid-thirties, brought a new energy to architectural education, his pivotal role affirmed by appointment as Head Lecturer, for a newly minted part-time Diploma in Architecture established by the University of Queensland in 1937, awarded empire standing in 1940.²⁴

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²³ "Model Homes. Conditions of Competition," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), Building and Real Estate, February 26, 1935, 9.

²⁴ "Architecture Diploma has Empire Standing," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), November 21, 1940, 4.