



ROBERSTON (DACHAIDH CLANN NACHAIDH)

Background

The first home built on the northern side of Pennant Hills Road was *Dachaidh Clann Donnachaidh* or as it became known colloquially, *Robertson*.

The home was donated by Dr and Mrs J R M Robertson.

Dr Robertson, a Scottish born mining engineer, served on the Board of the Burnside Presbyterian Orphan Homes from 1916 until his death in 1932. The home along with its neighbour, Ivanhoe, was officially opened on 11 January 1919 by the Governor General of Australia, Sir Ronald Munro Ferguson and his wife.

The Scottish Australian of February 1919 described the building as follows:

"It is a two storey building of brick with stone dressing. The roof of all but the front portion is flat and made of reinforced concrete to form a promenade, from which the magnificent view of the surrounding country may be obtained. On the ground floor the front entrance leads through a porch to a spacious hall and staircase; to the right of the hall is the visitors' room with a large circular bay window. This floor also contains the dining room as well as an open shelter, kitchen, scullery, pantry, fuel shed, lavatory, fire escape and locker room. On the first floor is a large open dormitory, lavatories, linen lockers and a fire escape. In the front portion is accommodation for the matron and her assistant, with private offices for their use and a commodious sewing room. Out of this last apartment rises the staircase leading to the flat roof. From the bay

window in the ground floor, front elevation the wall is carried up to form a tower, which adds to the imposing appearance of the house. The elevations have been designed by the architects in the Scottish baronial style and the house has been christened Clan Donnachaidh. It contains 14 rooms and was erected by Mr Lightfoot of Auburn."

The architects were A L McCredie and Anderson.

Robertson was originally a boys' home with a capacity for 30 to 40 children.

The architect, Gregory Nolan, says of *Robertson* and its neighbour Ivanhoe:

"The theory of attempting to retain the homelike appearance of the buildings has been ignored and the two new structures were built mainly as architectural displays to the road rather than unpretentious buildings".

He goes on to explain that the provision of two complete storeys above ground gave more access to light and air. The single entrance on the ground floor enhances the quietness of the upper level. The service rooms around the stairwell and the arrangement of bathrooms at the rear made for a more efficient regulation of movement in the high activity areas of the building.

Mr Nolan concludes:

"The whole arrangement leads to a more comfortable unit, likened to a large country mansion rather than an orphan home".

War Years

During World War II the children were evacuated from Burnside to temporary homes in the Blue Mountains while Burnside was occupied by the Second Australian Army. *Robertson* was occupied by Camp Com Salv and Provost.

1945 to present

The children returned to North Parramatta in January 1945 and *Robertson* resumed its previous role as a boys' home.

Between 1947 and August 1949 the home was renovated. This included the upgrading of the bathrooms, lavatories and kitchen, with the fuel stove being replaced by gas, the addition of a stainless steel sink, and purchase of a refrigerator. The hot water boiler was moved to the outside and the premises were painted internally. It is possibly at this time that the original slate roof was replaced by terra cotta tiles and the building was painted externally.

Miss Purser, the matron at *Robertson*, resigned in October 1955 and thereafter *Robertson* was managed by house parents, Mr and Mrs Paris, until April 1958, followed by Mr and Mrs Ryan, Mr and Mrs Greig and Mr and Mrs Kelly.

During Mr and Mrs Gordon's period from December 1960 further changes were made to the home in keeping with new attitudes to child care. The dormitories in *Robertson* were divided up in 1963 so that a maximum of 5 children shared a room, the overall number of children in *Robertson* being reduced to 20. The children were given individual wardrobes to replace the clothes room and shutters were replaced by conventional windows. Television sets were introduced.

Subsequent house parents included Mr and Mrs Wilkinson from April 1964, Mr and Mrs Davidson from June 1967 and finally Mr and Mrs Lewis from October 1968.

Robertson ceased to operate as a home in 1977 and was converted into administration offices for the Burnside Homes for Children. The cost of the necessary alterations were borne by an anonymous donor.

In 1986 the Administration moved to the former War Memorial Home at the opposite extreme of the property, and *Robertson* along with Ivanhoe, Sargood Hall, Blackwood, Son of the Rock and Reid Homes were leased by the Redeemer Baptist School. The property was sold to the School on 22 July 1994.