

# *“Moderately Modern”: The Reading of Modern Dutch Architecture by a Queensland Architect*

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*This paper examines the reception and understanding of the work of Dutch architect Willem Dudok (1884-1974) and modern architecture by Australian architect, Frank Cullen (1909-91). They were separated from each other spatially and temporally. It is argued that Cullen’s understanding of Dudok’s architecture was mediated mostly through the work of other Australian architects, including Queenslanders Robert Cummings (1900-89), Charles Fulton (1905-81), and Frank Costello (1903-87), who all had first-hand knowledge of Dudok’s work.*

*It is contended that Cullen’s interest in Dudok, and that of his contemporaries, was motivated by a desire to identify an architectural practice that was “moderately modern.” This modernism eschewed ornament and was functional, efficient and ahistorical. It walked, however, a middle path between the hard abstraction and the rigid functionalism associated with European architects such as Le Corbusier and Gropius and the psychological comfort and stability that was linked to a continuing use of traditional materials and forms.*

*This paper will demonstrate that Cullen accessed the latter via a British reading of Dutch modernism conveyed to Queensland by lectures, writings and architects coming out of the Architecture Association, London, during the 1920s-30s. In this instance, distance (Queensland) looked back (to Dutch modernism), but the image received was tempered and modified by sources that were both geographically and temporally displaced from the original. Ultimately, a “softer modernism” that was compatible with Queensland tastes was produced by successfully blending new materials and technologies with that of the traditional.*

*Keywords: Frank Cullen; Dudok; functional building; modern architecture in Queensland Australia; moderately modern; middle path*

The major building type that sustained the practice of Queensland architect Frank Cullen (1909-91) was schools for the Catholic Church, of which 128 were erected between 1936 and 1980. Cullen registered as an architect in June 1935, in the middle of the Great Depression, and apart from a brief partnership from 1937-41 with Desmond Egan (1906-41), worked mostly as a sole-practitioner. He gradually took on assistant architects from the mid-1950s until he expanded the practice into a multi-partner firm in 1961, working until he retired in 1982.

Cullen's early schools employed traditional styles common to the Catholic Church in Queensland such as the Romanesque brick schools of St Sebastian's, Yeronga (1937) and Holy Spirit, New Farm (1937), or plain conventional styling for small timber schools. In the late 1930s, Cullen and Egan introduced new stylistic elements into their school designs that included geometric art deco brickwork motifs on façades, stepped parapets, and vertical rectangular panels of glass bricks on stairwells.<sup>1</sup>

During 1941-53, Cullen produced a set of fifteen schools that were stylistically distinct from the rest of his work and not characteristic of Catholic Church architecture of the inter-war period.<sup>2</sup> These were all ahistorical, functional designs that employed minimal ornament. They were constructed in most instances, with light-to-medium coloured orange or brown-orange brick and displayed asymmetric massing of simple interlocking cubic forms with a strong horizontal expression (fig. 1). This horizontality was accentuated with continuous cantilevered concrete window awnings, horizontal banks of windows and parapet copings.

These school designs were superseded by a preference for more contemporary styling from 1953-80 resulting from Archbishop James Duhig's dissatisfaction with modern architecture for church school designs in 1953, and the design influences of architects who had gradually joined Cullen's practice from the mid-1950s.<sup>3</sup>

Visually, the minimalist aesthetic of these fifteen schools recalls the work of modern Dutch architect, Willem M. Dudok (1884-1974). Dudok was known for his distinctive use "of vertical and horizontal volumes, the masses of walls set against voids and bands of windows ... floating roof planes" and the dramatic juxtaposition "of hollow spaces and volumetric elements" and yellow glazed brick for "the unifying skin."<sup>4</sup> Dudok was a significant inter-war influence on three architects working in

<sup>1</sup> These include three designs by Cullen & Egan for St Patrick's, Gympie (1938), St Joseph's, Chinchilla (1938), and St Mary's, Beaudesert (1939).

<sup>2</sup> This encompasses a group of fifteen schools including: Mt St Michael's College, Ashgrove (1941); Our Lady Help of Christians, Hendra (1946); St Patrick's, Pomona (1947); St Mary's, Ipswich (1948); Our Lady of the Assumption, Norman Park (1948); St Joseph's, Childers (1948/51); St Vincent's, Surfers Paradise (1949-55, demolished); St Luke's, Buranda (1949, demolished); Marist Boy's College, Rosalie (1949); Star of the Sea School, Gladstone (1950); Soubirous College, Scarborough (1951); St Anthony's, Kedron (1951); St Joseph's at Kangaroo Point (1951); Guardian Angels, Wynnum (1952, altered); Villanova College, Coorparoo (1953 & 55). These schools represent groups with flat-roofs or hipped-roofs, or both. Villanova College was the only school to be symmetrically massed and to have a strong vertical motif in the form of a centrally placed tower.

<sup>3</sup> Archbishop James Duhig, Letter to Frank Cullen, Architect, November 20, 1953, Brisbane Roman Catholic Archdiocese Archives.

<sup>4</sup> Yukio Futagawa and Wilhelm Holzbauer, *Willem Marinus Dudok Town Hall, Hilversum, Netherlands, 1928-31* (Tokyo: A.D.A. Editra Tokyo, 1981), 3, 5, 7.



Mt St Michael's, Ashgrove (1941)



St Patrick's, Pomona (1947)



St Mary's, Ipswich (1948)



St Luke's, Buranda (1949-Dem.)



Marist Bros. College, Rosalie (1949)



Villanova College, Coorparoo (1953 & 55)

Queensland, who had travelled to Europe and gained first-hand experience of his works. This was reflected in the functionalist building designs of Robert Cummings (1900-89), Charles Fulton (1905-87) and Frank Costello (1903-87). Examples include: the 1937 Masel House at Stanthorpe, by Charles Fulton (for J.P. Donoghue & C.W.T. Fulton); the 1938 Second Church Christ Scientist in Clayfield, Brisbane, by Bruce Lucas & Robert Cummings; the 1938 Nudgee Junior College at Indooroopilly, Brisbane, by Donoghue & Fulton; the 1940 First Church Christ Scientist, Brisbane, by Lucas & Cummings; the 1941 Fulton residence, Indooroopilly, Brisbane, by Charles Fulton; and from 1942 to 1951, various electrical substations and pump stations designed by Frank Costello, Brisbane City Architect.<sup>5</sup>

As these buildings were erected in Queensland and were well publicised and known, there is little doubt that Cullen would have been familiar with them. However, as Cullen left no records to explain his influences and interests, this paper will instead consider the more general question of what architectural values and ideas Dudok represented for those Queensland architects who had travelled to see the new architecture in inter-war Europe, and how these values were transferred to influence and inform their contemporaries who had stayed in Australia.

Extensive studies documenting Dudok's influence on Australian architecture have been undertaken including the PhD thesis by Carol Hardwick, (1998), publications by architect historian, Donald Langmead (1996) and the undergraduate thesis of Ivan McDonald (1983).<sup>6</sup> They respectively argue that while Dudok's influence was widespread in Australia, and expressed across a number of different building typologies (including Town Halls,

Figure 1. Selection of Cullen's functionalist schools. (Photograph of Mt St Michael's College, Ashgrove, 1941, (top left), courtesy of Sisters of Charity Congregational Archives 2019. All remaining photographs by author, 2014-17.)

5 "Doctor's Residence, Stanthorpe, Queensland," *Building*, December 24, 1937, 25; "Masel Residence (former)" Queensland Heritage Register, accessed March 8, 2019, <https://apps.des.qld.gov.au/heritage-register/detail/?id=601552>; "Buildings Which Have Won Awards For Architects," *The Courier-Mail*, October 10, 1940, 5; "First Church of Christ, Scientist, Brisbane," Queensland Heritage Register, accessed March 8, 2019, <https://apps.des.qld.gov.au/heritage-register/detail/?id=650017>; Australian Institute of Architects Queensland Chapter, "Application for Entry of a State Heritage Place in the Queensland Heritage Register," 2015, accessed March 8, 2019, <http://www.architecture.com.au/docs/default-source/qld-policy-advocacy/qld-heritage-register-submission--first-church-of-christ-scientist-10-september-2015.pdf?sfvrsn=0>; Margaret Therese Lawrence-Drew, "Lucas and Cummings Architects" (BArch thesis, University of Queensland 1986), 50 & 185; "Fulton Residence," Queensland Heritage Register, accessed March 8, 2019, <https://apps.des.qld.gov.au/heritage-register/detail/?id=602208>; Scott Chaseling, "Frank Costello: City Architect 1941-1952, City Planner 1946-1952" (BArch thesis, University of Queensland, 1997); Carole Hardwick, "The Dissemination and influence of Willem M. Dudok's work in the climate of modernism in architecture in Australia 1930-1955" (PhD diss., University of Sydney, 1998), 171, 229-33; Ivan McDonald, "Early Modern Brisbane: Some Aspects of the Development of Modern Architecture in Brisbane Before World War Two" (DipArch. thesis, University of Queensland, 1983), 33, 58, 88.

airport buildings, defence buildings, power stations, hospitals, public works buildings, hotels, and domestic architecture), it was in schools that his influence dominated.<sup>7</sup>

However, few studies have considered what Dudok's work, and Dutch modernism in general, represented to these architects. In this paper it is argued that Dudok's appeal lay in his representation of a practice that was distinctly modern but "moderate," offering a middle path between the "extremes" of international modernism and the expressionism of the neo-plastic Amsterdam school; an architectural practice that was simple, efficient and of its time but also comfortable, both physically and psychologically. This conception of Dudok provides the context for Cullen's reception and understanding of the Dutch architect and in turn, his engagement with a larger debate on "modern" tendencies in architecture and their introduction to an Australian public.

## The Mediation of Dudok in Britain and Australia (1922-36)

The most probable source of information for Queensland architects of Dudok's work, particularly the large number of schools he designed and built, were the photographic images and texts produced by Architectural Association Secretary, Frank Yerbury (1885-1970), and Howard Robertson (1888-1963), architect and the Principal of the Architectural Association School of Architecture (AA). Individually and collaboratively, they produced over 200 publications during 1922 to 1936 that mediated the transfer of knowledge of the largely unknown "new architecture" of continental Europe to the predominantly conservative and insular British architecture establishment, which initially viewed the new architecture as "extreme," with first acceptance of modernist work only occurring in 1929.<sup>8</sup> Architectural historian Andrew Higgott describes Robertson and Yerbury as among the most "influential figures in the British architectural culture of the 1920s and 1930s" with their publications later viewed as being canonical.<sup>9</sup> Hardwick also notes the importance of the mediation of Dudok to British architects as "for many Australian architects it was while they were in the United Kingdom that they were first introduced to Dudok."<sup>10</sup>

From early on in their publications, Robertson and Yerbury positioned Dudok as representing a more moderate or softer modern. In 1922, Robertson published "Modern Dutch Architecture"—an article in the *Architectural Review* that praised

6 Hardwick, "The Dissemination of Willem M. Dudok"; Donald Langmead, *Willem Marinus Dudok, a Dutch Modernist: A Bio-bibliography* (London: Greenwood Press, 1996); Donald Langmead, "Joy in Colour: Absentee Impressions of Dudok's Architecture," *Proceedings of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand* 10, ed. Ian Kelly (Perth: SAHANZ, 1993), 39-52; McDonald, "Early Modern Brisbane".

7 Hardwick, "The Dissemination of Willem M. Dudok," 251.

8 Andrew Higgott, *Travels in Modern Architecture, 1925-1930* (London: Architectural Assoc., 1989), 8, 15-16.

9 Andrew Higgott, "Travels in Modern Architecture 1925-30: Howard Robertson & F. R. Yerbury: AA Exhibition Gallery 11 January - 16 February 1990," *AA Files* 21 (1991): 62.

10 Hardwick, "The Dissemination of Willem M. Dudok," 331.

the “ultra-modernist” Amsterdam housing works of Michel de Klerk for their “extraordinarily fine brickwork, ... perfect craftsmanship and ... ingenuity.”<sup>11</sup> While no reference to Dudok was made in this paper, in 1923 he extended his argument to include Dudok’s work, stating that it represented a “moderate school” of modern architectural design.<sup>12</sup> He developed this idea by contrasting images of Dudok’s Rembrandt school (1920) with the more “imaginative” or “extreme” work of Michel de Klerk and Piet Kramer of the Amsterdam school.<sup>13</sup> Identifying Dudok as part of a “rival” school in Dutch architecture, he argued that his work relied on:

*effects gained almost completely by the massing of rectangular shapes and the stressing and contrast of vertical and horizontal lines. ... Effective use is made of advancing and receding planes at varied levels, and riotous decorative effects are replaced by concentrated grouping or restrained texture treatment. ... Work of this type approaches very nearly what one may term architectural cubism and the almost total absence of sloping roofs adds to the impression of effects obtained by rectangular forms alone.*<sup>14</sup>

Turning to Dudok’s Bosdrift Bathhouse (1921) Robertson concluded, “he has been successful in creating a design that is aggressively modern yet reasonable. The forms are powerful and expressive.”<sup>15</sup> Robertson deliberately positioned Dudok’s architecture as demonstrating a middle ground or path—something that sat between the romantic expressionism of the Amsterdam school and the harsher functionalist or extreme styles of the De Stijl group. Langmead, in his 1996 book *Willem Dudok*, observed that “Robertson recognized his [Dudok’s] genius and welcomed the temperance that distinguished his work from the New Objectivity.” He also suggested that Dudok’s “acceptance by more conservative British architects rested upon that moderation.”<sup>16</sup>

Many images of Dudok’s schools at Hilversum were shown in subsequent publications during the 1920s by Yerbury and Robertson including: Dr Bavinck (1921), Oranje (1922), Jan van der Heijden (1926), Minkeler (1927), Catharina (1927), Juliana (1927), Vondel, (1929), Nelly Bodenheim (1929), Ruysdael (1929), Fabritus (1926), and Multatuli (1932).<sup>17</sup> Yerbury, in his lecture to the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) on Dutch Modernism in 1931, pointed to the architecture of the Netherlands for its negotiation of two ideologies.<sup>18</sup> He argued that Holland was “steering a course in its architecture between two schools of thought, the romantic or

11 Howard Robertson, “Modern Dutch Architecture,” *Architectural Review* 52, no. 309 (August 1922): 50.

12 Howard Robertson, “Modern Dutch Architecture,” *Architectural Review* 54, no. 322 (September 1923): 97-98.

13 Robertson, “Modern Dutch Architecture” (1922), 98, 99, 100a.

14 Robertson, “Modern Dutch Architecture” (1923), 98.

15 Robertson, “Modern Dutch Architecture” (1923), 100a.

16 Langmead, *Willem Marinus Dudok*, 61.

17 Langmead, *Willem Marinus Dudok*, 31; Frank Yerbury, *Modern European Building* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1928); Frank Yerbury, *Modern Dutch Buildings* (London: Ernest Benn, 1931), plates 27-37.

18 Frank Yerbury, “Modern Building in Holland,” *Architect and Building News* 128 (November 13, 1931): 198.

eccentric on the one hand ... and the functionalist on the other, which sought to eliminate everything which made a building human.”<sup>19</sup> Yerbury also criticised Dutch architects copying the international or functionalist styles developing in France and Germany, but singled out the work of those who had managed to avoid such “extremes.” He argued that:

*This middle course was especially apparent in the work of such men as Dudok, who was responsible for most of the buildings at Hilversum, ... where he had produced some of the most charming schools in Europe, besides an epoch-making Town Hall. Another building illustrating this middle course was the magnificent Van Nelle Factory at Rotterdam [by Brinkman & van der Vlugt].*<sup>20</sup>

The reference to Dudok’s “epoch-making Town Hall” was significant as the first known mention of it in the British architectural press.<sup>21</sup>

The publishing efforts of Robertson and Yerbury intensified from 1930 to 1934, resulting in a series of articles in *Architect and Building News* all showing Yerbury’s photographic images of Dudok’s Vondel school (1929) which, we are told, “contrives to avoid the look of an educational *institution*: it is not forbidding and municipal looking”; and the Multatuli school (1930), described as “having a delightful composition” with raked horizontal joints in the brickwork to give a “marked horizontal effect.”<sup>22</sup> In a February 1931 article on Dudok’s Fabritus (1926) and Ruysdael (1929) schools, Robertson wrote that “Dudok is animated by a strong desire to create buildings which are in harmony with the spirit of to-day” and that “Dudok invariably manages, even in his more mechanistic facades, to introduce an element of playfulness which gives value to the general severity.”<sup>23</sup>

The various articles describe Dudok’s schools as being charming, gay, colourful and delightful, suggesting the opposite of the harsh, and more austere, functionalist school designs found elsewhere on the continent. Yerbury in his 1931 book *Modern Dutch Buildings* also noted that “The work of Dudok ... is simple and graceful, at times almost severe, but exhibiting always a pleasant sense of phantasy [sic] which finds expression especially in the many schools which he has built.”<sup>24</sup> A year later, travelling Australian architect Sydney Ancher commented that his schools were “certainly a joy to behold. ... Clean, efficient and expressive of purpose, they certainly do appeal.”<sup>25</sup> It is Yerbury’s images that are identified by Langmead, Hardwick

19 Yerbury, “Modern Building in Holland” (1931), 198.

20 Yerbury, “Modern Building in Holland” (1931), 198.

21 Langmead, *Willem Marinus Dudok*, 31.

22 Howard Robertson & Frank Yerbury, “Dudok Enjoys Himself,” *Architect & Building News* 124 (August 4, 1930): 182; Howard Robertson & Frank Yerbury, “Dudok Enjoys Himself Again,” *Architect & Building News* 124 (August 15, 1930): 210-11; Howard Robertson, “Dudok and his Work,” *Architect & Building News* 138 (June 1, 1934): 253; Langmead, *Willem Marinus Dudok*, 31.

23 Howard Robertson & Frank Yerbury, “A Theme with Variations: The Hilversum Schools of W. M. Dudok,” *Architect & Building News* 128 (February 1, 1931): 216 & 219.

24 Yerbury, *Modern Dutch Buildings*, viii.

25 Sydney Edward Ancher, “Reports of Travelling Scholars,” *Architecture* 21 no. 7 (July 1, 1932): 155.

and Higgott as the most important agents in the promotion and dissemination of Dudok's works outside of the Netherlands, particularly in Britain and America.<sup>26</sup>

The successful contemporary use of brick by the Dutch was commented on by Yerbury in his book *Modern Dutch Buildings*, observing that although it was a traditional building material, its use in modern architecture harmonised well with earlier forms of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, thus enabling retention of "a subtle traditional character."<sup>27</sup> Robertson in his 1934 article "Dudok and his Work" for the *Architect & Building News* argued that his affinity with English architects was a result of his closeness to "English modern architectural ideals." He goes on to note that "principles guide him, but they are not hardened into creeds. He is not a "group man." The work which he does is free and requires no label."<sup>28</sup> Dudok thus avoided being tagged a dogmatic extremist and a perceptible threat to English architectural thought, offering instead an outlook and aesthetic that was seen by English architects, such as Robertson, as sympathetic to it.

At Yerbury's invitation, Dudok gave a talk entitled "Buildings at Hilversum" to the AA on May 29, 1934 (supplemented by an exhibition of his work), which was published in the *Architecture Association Journal*.<sup>29</sup> In his lecture, Dudok described his town hall at Hilversum, the Beehive [Bijenkorf] store at Rotterdam, the Columbarium at Westerveld cemetery and the Collège Néerlandais, Paris (1938) and showed slides of these amongst other works. Dudok described his use of modern and traditional materials (i.e. concrete with brick), colour, the relationship between form and function in his buildings and the "small value" he placed on "external decoration."<sup>30</sup> Of his town hall, we are told, he employed a simple functional design that blended traditional with modern elements noting "that the interior displays a character remarkably consistent with the exterior" and that "architectural effect" is achieved "out of simple structural masses, and relief and contrast are obtained more by large elements than by small decorations." Dudok claimed that his aim was to produce a building that was: "not merely comfortable or convenient in working, it is also intended to be a joy to look at and a pleasure to remember. I tried to make it a civic tradition ... translated into a modern, though cheerful efficiency."<sup>31</sup>

Dudok's talk was attended and reported on by two Australian travelling scholars, Frank Costello (1903-1987) and Benjamin Stone (c1903-c1963), in the Australian journal *Architecture*.<sup>32</sup> In addition to the London Underground Railway stations designed by Charles Holden, both Stone and Costello cited

26 Langmead, *Willem Marinus Dudok*, 50, citing C.H. James & Yerbury, *Small Houses for the Community*, (London: Crosby Lockwood 1924); Langmead, "Joy in Colour," 41; Hardwick, "The Dissemination of Willem M. Dudok," 143-44, 196-99; Yerbury, Francis Rowland, Andrew Higgott and Ian Jeffrey, *Frank Yerbury: Itinerant Cameraman: Architectural Photographs 1920-35* (London: Architectural Association, 1987), 11; Andrew Higgott, "Frank Yerbury and the Representation of the New," in *Camera Constructs: Photography, Architecture and the Modern City*, ed. Andrew Higgott & Timothy Wray (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 23-24.

27 Yerbury, *Modern Dutch Buildings*, vi.

28 Robertson, "Dudok and his Work," (1934), 253.

29 Willem Dudok, "A.A. General Meeting: Tuesday, May 29th, 1934 - Buildings at Hilversum," *The Architectural Association Journal* 50 (June 1934): 4-20.

30 Dudok, "A.A. General Meeting," 27.

31 Dudok, "A.A. General Meeting," 9.

32 Lawrence-Drew, "Lucas and Cummings," 23; Benjamin T. Stone, "Highlights of Modern English, European and American Architecture," *Architecture* 27 no.8 (August 1, 1937): 172.

“the Town Hall at Hornsey” (1935) by Reginald Uren (a project both Costello and Stone had worked on with Uren), and “Ravenscourt Park Hospital,” Hammersmith (1933) by Burnett, Tait and Lorne as inspired by the work of Dudok.<sup>33</sup> Dudok’s appeal and acceptance by the British architectural establishment was affirmed when he received the RIBA Gold medal in 1935, elevating his cachet internationally; although in the Australian press this honour is barely reported, appearing as a single short sentence.<sup>34</sup>

33 Stone, “Highlights of Modern,” 175; Chaseling, “Frank Costello,” 66-126; F.G. Costello, “A Trip Through Holland,” *Architecture* 25 no.12 (December, 1936): 284.

34 “Bricks in Fashion,” *The Telegraph*, September 10, 1935, 15.

Robertson and Yerbury’s reading of Dudok’s appeal was taken up by a number of later historians and architecture commentators including Watson Sharp (1938), Reyner Banham (1960), Hans Redeker (1964), Manfredo Tafuri (1980), Hans van Dijk (1981), Alan Powers (2001) and recently by John Stewart (2019).<sup>35</sup> All place Dudok on a “middle path” or as practicing in a “third way,” and it is argued that it was this alternate approach, or more moderate path, that formed the basis for his appeal to English and Australian architects. The historians also place Dudok between traditionalist and functionalist ideologies, with Banham describing Dudok as “the hero-figure of middle-of-the-road Modernists,” and Powers stating that he represented “progress rather than revolution.”<sup>36</sup>

35 W. Watson Sharp, “Editorial: Colour In Architecture,” *Decoration and Glass* 4, no. 3 (July 1938): 5; Hans Redeker, «Dudok Hilversum en het Geluk,” *Algemeen Handelsblad (Supplement)*, July 25, 1964, 15; Hans van Dijk, “Een Ongemakkelijke Sinieur,” *NRC Handelsblad (cultural supplement)*, May 15, 1981, 1; Alan Powers, *Britain: Modern Architectures in History* (London: Reaktion Books 2007), 61; John Stewart, *Twentieth Century Town Halls: Architecture of Democracy* (London: Routledge, 2019), 84.

36 Reyner Banham, *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1960), 164; Powers, *Britain*, 61.

## Moderately Modern Queensland

Not all Dudok’s works were readily accepted or praised in Australia. Editorial captions to photos that accompanied some of the travelling architects’ reports expressed mixed and inconsistent sentiments. In 1931 *Building* magazine conveyed both interest and acceptance of Dudok’s school designs. A photo of the unidentified Catharina kindergarten school (1927) was captioned: “another example of the unorthodox manner in which school buildings are being treated in Holland at the present day.”<sup>37</sup> A second image in the article was of the (unidentified) Rembrandt School (1920). Titled “A Modern Dutch School” it received a more favourable description by the editor:

*the work of the modern Dutch architects is playing an important part in the development of architecture. ... In massing, fenestration and conception this work definitely breaks away from accepted standards yet there are few who will deny its charms. Cornices, columns, pilasters—the whole gamut of architectural features usually associated with scholastic buildings—are absent, yet even those who sponsor all these*

37 “An Architect Returns from Abroad: Dutch Lessons for Australia,” *Building* 47, no. 282 (February 12, 1931): 28.



*appendages must admit that there is little wrong with this example.*<sup>38</sup>

38 "An Architect Returns," 31.

A similar sentiment was expressed in 1931 by Melbourne architect, Marcus Martin, in the *Journal of the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects*. He wrote that "Holland is producing a modern Architecture of a decidedly national character" and that although it failed in completely "breaking away from tradition" it "remained ... free from the artificiality and bad taste of the 19th century."<sup>39</sup> Architect Benjamin Stone also agreed when he wrote in *Architecture* in 1935 that: "in the truest meaning of the word 'modern', Dudok, in his great Town Hall, has achieved a truly efficient and decorative building without the use of any applied ornament."<sup>40</sup>

39 Marcus W. Martin, "Notes on the Development of Architecture on the Continent," *Journal of the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects* 29, no. 6 (January 1932): 173.

40 B.T. Stone, "Board of Architects of New South Wales—Report of Travelling Scholar—8th report," *Architecture* (May 1935): 91-92.

After returning to Queensland at the end of 1930, following study and travel abroad, Queensland architect Robert Cummings became instrumental in teaching architecture.<sup>41</sup> As a student of Howard Robertson and Frank Yerbury at the AA from 1924-27, and working at the offices of John Murray Easton & Howard Robertson, and Robert Atkinson, during 1925-30, he would have learned of their ideas on Dudok and Dutch modernism. These ideas were echoed in Cummings' own lectures on International modernism. In a lecture titled "Modern Tendencies in Architecture" (1934), given as part of a series of ABC Radio Talks broadcast nationally, he like Yerbury and Robertson before him, described the work of French architect Le Corbusier as "extremist" and "an architect who infers that buildings are purely functional necessities just as aeroplanes and such other mechanical devices are."<sup>42</sup> He went on to describe the work of Dutch modernism as adopting a more moderate path:

41 John Macarthur and Deborah van der Plaats, "Cummings, Robert," in *The Encyclopedia of Australian Architecture*, ed. Philip Goad and Julie Willis (Port Melbourne, Vic.: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 184-85.

42 Robert Cummings, "Modern Tendencies in Architecture," 4QG Radio talk, script, September 4, 1934, 5.

*Holland is a small country which has a remarkable architectural character of its own. Brick is the traditional building material of the Dutch people and to-day it is combined most successfully with more modern materials in the carrying out of striking new building forms which are the outcome of present necessity.*<sup>43</sup>

43 Cummings, "Modern Tendencies," 5.

Parallel themes were also observed by *The Telegraph* (Brisbane) in 1935. An article covering the popularity of bricks in Brisbane, indicated "brickwork is a splendid and mobile material, and one which will lend itself to modern uses. ... There still remains much to be done in the exploitation of brickwork to our modern uses." It also pointed out "under the Influence of M. Dudok ... [a]n interesting brick architecture has arisen in Holland, this style being extensively employed in scholastic work."<sup>44</sup>

44 "Bricks in Fashion," 15.

Many of these ideas are expressed by Cummings in his built work. His First Church Christ Scientist (1940), at North Quay Brisbane is commonly linked to the influence of Dutch modernism and the work of Dudok showing a style that “is early modern with stripped classical elements.”<sup>45</sup> Built with creamy-yellow face brick, it is a simply-massed, asymmetric grouping of geometric forms with undecorated brickwork, cantilevered reinforced concrete window awnings, and rectilinear parapets concealing low-pitched roofs. A contemporary account of the heritage-listed building describes it as a “careful composition of simple, cubic volumes of one and two storeys, enveloped in buff-coloured brickwork with concrete parapets and continuous window hoods.”<sup>46</sup> It is also said to have a “simplicity and clarity of form, and an emphasis on horizontal lines create particular visual appeal, delight and interest.”<sup>47</sup> Even in 1940, a caption to a photo of the building published in *The Courier-Mail*, suggested that: “the building is notable for the extreme simplicity of the modern architectural design.”<sup>48</sup>

45 Lawrence-Drew, “Lucas and Cummings,” 50; AIA QLD Chapter, “Application for Entry.”

46 “First Church of Christ,” Queensland Heritage Register.

47 “First Church of Christ,” Queensland Heritage Register.

48 “Show Preparations,” *The Courier-Mail*, August 5, 1940, 6.

In addition to Cummings’ work, the buildings of Donoghue & Fulton (1937-46) added to the Queensland context and understanding of Dudok. Like the work of Cummings, some of their buildings have been associated with the work of Dudok in representing a mode of practice that was modern but also moderate and inoffensive. Donoghue and Fulton’s award-winning Nudgee Junior College for the Christian brothers at Indooroopilly opened in 1938 (fig. 2). Built in creamy-brown face brick on an elevated site with three cubic volumes linked by interconnecting arms, it displayed an angular geometric horizontality and asymmetric massing with a façade comprising minimal decorative brickwork. It incorporated streamlined cantilevered balconies and curved walls on the rear elevation and utilised cantilevered concrete window awnings. *The Catholic Leader* cited the college as an example of “modern architecture” while retaining an “air of homeliness” while *The Telegraph* added that the “modern architectural style is arresting to the eye.”<sup>49</sup>

49 “Nudgee New Junior College,” *The Catholic Leader* (Brisbane), July 14, 1938: 14; “Nudgee New Junior College,” *The Telegraph* (Brisbane), July 9, 1938, 14.

At the opening ceremony, the architects were commended by the Principal of the school, Rev. Brother J.K. O’Neill, for their ability to blend old and new architecture by meeting the challenge of “erecting a building that would be in keeping with the best traditions of the past; a building to harmonise with the beauties of the natural surroundings; and a building that would embody the best and latest in [modern] educational ideals ....”<sup>50</sup> In informed terms he added that the architects had:

50 “Nudgee New Junior College,” *The Catholic Leader*, 14.

*succeeded in combining in this building the modernistic trend of architecture with the classic proportions of a more ancient style. The old and new have been called on to secure externally an artistic outline that harmonises with the surroundings, and internally a wise economy in the use of space, lighting and ventilation, and full consideration for the purpose each section is to serve.*<sup>51</sup>

51 "Nudgee New Junior College," *The Catholic Leader*, 14.

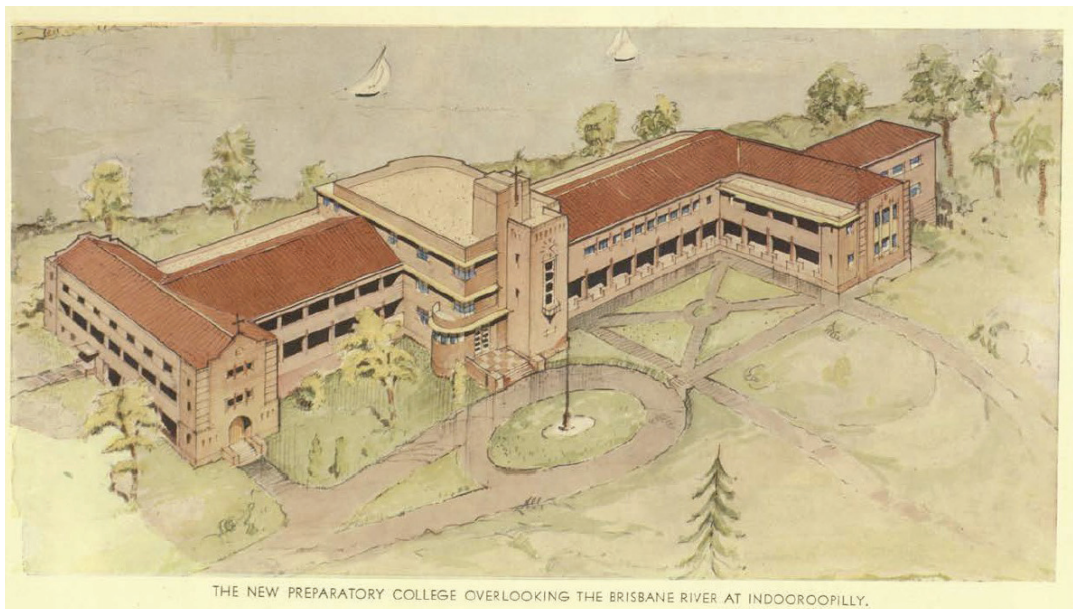
Of significance in Archbishop Duhig's opening address was the acknowledgement that "in architectural design and general layout the building shows a welcome departure from old styles ... [and] ... has given us ... one of the most attractive college buildings in Australia" He added: "the modern aspects of the building ... are beautifully blended with the older designs."<sup>52</sup> Duhig (and thereby the Catholic Church) had for the first time, publicly sanctioned modern school design.

52 "Nudgee New Junior College," *The Catholic Leader*, 14.

## Conclusion

In summary, this paper presents a portrayal of the architectural climate in which Cullen worked in conservative Queensland during the inter-war to immediate post-war period. It foregrounds the influence of Dutch architect Willem Dudok on British and subsequently Australian architecture at the time. It shows that transference of his influence to Cullen was mediated by the modern work of architects active in Queensland in the late 1930s and early 1940s, who had seen Dudok's works first-

Figure 2. Sketch of proposed Nudgee Junior College, Indooroopilly, December 1937 (Reprinted from *Nudgee College Magazine*, 1939, 71)



hand, and had connections with the AA in London and/or leading British modern architects.

That Cullen had incorporated elements of their work into his school buildings, demonstrates that he was both cognisant and influenced by the “middle of the road” alternative Dudok’s work offered to extreme European modernism or traditional forms of the past. To an architect like Cullen, the idea of a moderate modernism would have been important in the mid-to-late 1930s, as he sought a way to evolve “modern” designs for Catholic schools that were ahistorical and of their time, whilst being acceptable to his client, the Catholic Church.

Cullen succeeded by designing schools with a “restrained modern” look. His new school buildings were deployed as “billboards” that promoted a Catholic Education that was modern, but religious-based and inclusive of traditional/moral values. That the Catholic Church looked in-step with modern times became important when the population boom in post-war Australia underpinned the requirement for new school buildings.

The second-hand reading of Dudok’s architecture by Cullen informed a “moderately modern” practice that can be recognised as of importance for illustrating the transference of modern architectural influence across time and space.