



ALBERTO DIAS SOARES (1830-1909)

Rev'd Canon Alberto Soares could be described as the first architect active in and around what was to become the Australian Capital Territory. Born in London to the commercial Consul for Portugal and his artistic English wife and educated at London University School, he was a trained artist (Academia das Belles Artes, Oporto, 1847 and in Paris) and engineer (Putney College, London, 1849). After emigrating in 1852 he gained architectural experience with Edmund Blacket in Sydney.

Having been called to the Church of England in 1855, Soares began as lay assistant in Collector, took deacon's orders in 1856 and entered upon his first incumbency as the priest in charge at Queanbeyan in 1857. He saw the need to replace the inadequate 1844 church and designed the Victorian Romanesque style Christ Church (1859-61). To illustrate his design, Soares made a cardboard model and produced coloured lithographs, which were sold to raise funds for the church's construction. Soon after the Church of England Diocese of Goulburn was formed in 1863, he was appointed Honorary Diocesan Architect by the first Bishop of Goulburn, Dr Mesac Thomas, who had visited George and Marianne Campbell's 'beautiful mansion' at Duntroon. Marianne intended to replace the old Duntroon Homestead with a grand Victorian villa and the first stage, a wing attached to the north-east corner, was completed about 1862. She appears to have based her sketch design on illustrations in pattern books. Being close to the Campbell family, Soares would have been willing and able to advise on aspects of the design, provide construction details and supervise the work. Tradesmen who worked on the building have told their descendants that he was its architect.

The Gothic Picturesque style bluestone church of St John the Baptist, Canberra (1841-5) had probably been based on a sketch by Bishop Broughton and in 1868 a Victorian Academic Gothic dressed sandstone tower designed by Edmund Blacket replaced the defective original tower. Soares was asked about 1871 by John Campbell to design a nave extension and chancel as a memorial to his father, Robert. Soares designed a completely new nave and chancel in an Early English style, with rubble sandstone for the walls and a roof pitch steeper than that of the old nave, to unify the church. As this could not be afforded, the old nave was extended by one bay in 1872 and the chancel was completed in 1874.

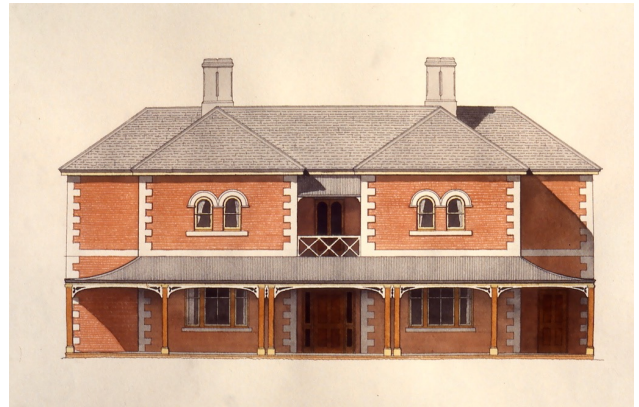
In all, Rev'd Canon Soares designed at least 15 churches, several church halls and schools. He designed 7 parsonages, notably for Queanbeyan (1872) and Canberra (1873), later known as Glebe House, demolished in 1954. His other important buildings in Queanbeyan were a residence, Hibernia Lodge (1865), St Stephen's Presbyterian Church (1874) and the Protestant Hall (1877). Appointed Canon of St Saviour's Cathedral in 1876, then Diocesan Registrar in 1884, he retired to Sydney in 1897. Soares, along with Blacket, raised the quality of church architecture in the diocese considerably. His picturesque churches were composed and sited with an artist's eye, particularly the Victorian Academic Gothic churches with spires at Cooma (1865-9), Wentworth (1871-3), Carwoola (1874) and Adelong (1882). Evidence of his engineering expertise can be seen in the methods he used to construct church roofs, such as hammer beam, barrel and complex scissors-trussed rafter roofs.

References:

Ken Charlton *Southern Spires The Art and Architecture of Revd Canon A.D. Soares* Diocese of Canberra & Goulburn Anglican Historical Society Journal No. 25, April 1998.

A.H. Body *Firm Still You Stand*, St John's Parish Council, Canberra, 1986.

Graeme Barrow *God's Architect, The churches and parsonages of Alberto Soares*, Dagraja Press, Hackett, 2016.



Top: Christ Church, Queanbeyan (1859-61).

Above left: St John the Baptist, Canberra, chancel (1874) and extension to nave (1872).

Above right: Parsonage of St John the Baptist, Canberra (1873), later known as Glebe House. Demolished 1954.

Photos and rendering by Ken Charlton.

The portrait of Alberto Soares is from his family records.