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TOWN OF  
**VICTORIA PARK**

# Robert Thompson McMaster (1865–1915)

Architect, Pastoralist, Public Official, War Hero

**MR. R. T. McMASTERS,**  
ARCHITECT AND BUILDING SURVEYOR  
(Late of Public Works Department),  
Having commenced practice, can be consulted  
on all matters pertaining to the Profession  
at his offices,  
ST. GEORGE'S CHAMBERS, PERTH



## Early Life

Robert Thompson McMaster was born in Melbourne, Victoria on 29 December 1865. His father was Vincent Robert McMaster. No record of Robert's mother or siblings has been found at present.

Robert attended Scotch College in Melbourne until the age of 16, when he was articled to well-known architect Michael Egan. He was indentured for eight years learning the trade before moving to Western Australia in the early 1890s to take advantage of the economic conditions surrounding the state's gold rush.

## Architecture

Robert designed many residential and commercial properties in and around Perth, including his own home (105 Berwick Street, Victoria Park), Smith's Chambers at 115-117 Barrack Street, and the Broken Hill Hotel on Albany Highway.

## Public life and 1st Mayor of Victoria Park

Local government was established in the area we now know as Victoria Park in 1894 with the founding of the Roads Board. The Municipality of Victoria Park was officially gazetted on 30 April 1897, with Robert McMaster as its first mayor. He held the office again in 1906-1907 and stood as an independent candidate for Canning Park in the 1911 state government elections.

Robert was also involved in pastoral activities. He established a farm at Merredin and owned racehorses, one of which – a stallion named "Barbarossa" – was a Royal Show prize winner and noted sire.

## Boer War

As a young man, Robert served five years as a Lieutenant in the Victorian Artillery, then five years in the WA Infantry.

When Britain asked her colonies for help in the Boer War (1899-1902), Robert accepted a commission as Captain in charge of the second of Western Australia's six contingents.

Robert was given his own send-off by the residents and Mayor of Victoria Park at the Town Hall before leaving Fremantle on 2 February 1900. During the war, he was present at the engagements of Diamond Hill and Sand River, receiving the King's South African Medal and the Queen's South African Medal with six clasps for his service.

## WWI Service and Death

Despite retiring from the military following the Boer War, Robert applied on 1 November 1914 for a commission in the Australian Imperial Forces. He was accepted, first as a Lieutenant in the 10th Light Horse, then Hon. Captain. Robert was so keen to sign up that he claimed to be five years younger to be under the age limit.

He embarked for the front from Fremantle on 19 April 1915. He fought in the famous Battle of the Nek on 7 August 1915, where he was killed in action alongside six other officers and 73 enlisted men from the 10th Light Horse. His body was never found, but his name is listed on the Lone Pine Memorial.

## Family and Legacy

Robert married Adelaide-born Emily Frances Helmsley Holman in 1894.

Together Robert and Emily had six children. One, Emily Vernon McMaster, was born in 1896 and died after only seven days. The surviving children were Ray Halliday, Alwyn Robert, Eric Frank, Jessie Lorn and Alice Frances Norma (often known as Norma or Nonna).

Robert was honoured in 1918 by the renaming of Hereford Street to McMaster Street, which intersects with Albany Highway across from the Town of Victoria Park's Memorial Gardens.

A few short metres away from the gardens stands the Broken Hill Hotel: a testament to a bygone era, a beloved local landmark, and a visual reminder of the architect's creative genius.

***Lest We Forget Robert Thompson McMaster.***