

RSA Obituary, transcribed from the 1921 RSA Annual Report

The son of an Edinburgh Solicitor, Sir Robert Rowand Anderson was born in 1834, and received his earlier education at George Watson's Hospital. His father intended him for his own profession, and he was for a while in a Solicitor's office. But the Law had no attractions for him. From his earliest year he had been fond of drawing, and we next hear of him as a pupil in the Ornamental Department of the Trustees' School of Design, then under the charge of William Christie, A.R.S.A. In due time he passed into the Antique and studied under Scott Lauder, where he was intimately associated with some of that Master's painter pupils.

Later he attended the Academy's Life Class. After an apprenticeship of some years in the office of John Lessels, a prominent Edinburgh Architect, young Anderson visited France, Italy and Holland, working at times in such offices as he could get access to, and everywhere, by the diligent use of notebook and memory, laying the foundations of his long and successful career.

As the fruits of his foreign travel he published at a later date a volume entitled 'Examples of the Municipal, Commercial and Street Architecture of France and Italy From the 12th to the 15th Century', in which were garnered for the benefit of succeeding students the sketches and measured drawings made at this time.

Sir Rowand's association with the Academy dates from 1860. When he contributed to the Exhibition three works, was his pre-eminent position in Scottish Architecture now recognised, that he was more than once invited to speak of his recent foreign tour. By this time, having supplemented his continental studies with some experience of London work in the office of Sir Gilbert Scott, Anderson had started business in Edinburgh on his own account.

From the catalogues of those years it can be gathered that whilst his earlier work was almost entirely ecclesiastical, after the middle seventies his practice became more varied, including buildings so diverse in purpose as the New Medical School, Edinburgh, the Scottish Conservative club, and the Central Station Buildings of the Caledonian Railway, Glasgow. Of his ecclesiastical work up to this date, the Catholic Apostolic Church, and the Campanile added to St. George's U.F. Church, both in Edinburgh, are perhaps best known.

Such variety of practice gave full scope for the exercise of Sir Rowand's wide grasp of the various phases of architectural design, but it may be said in a general way that his lay work is executed in one or other of the forms of the Renaissance, and his churches in Gothic; though his application of the latter to domestic work in Mount Stuart House forms a notable exception.

In recognition of his achievements as an Architect, and more especially of his great work in the design of the New Medical School, the University of Edinburgh, on the Occasion of its tercentenary celebrations in 1884, conferred on him the honorary degree of LL.D.

In the later half of his long professional career Sir Rowand Anderson carried out many important works, which greatly extended his reputation. So fully, indeed, was his pre-eminent position in Scottish Architecture now recognised, that he was more than once invited by Government to submit designs for works of Imperial importance; the last occasion being the competition for the Queen Victoria Memorial in 1901. Shortly thereafter he received the honour of Knighthood from His Majesty King Edward VII.

The Scottish National Portrait Gallery and Museum of Antiquities, commissioned from him by the donor, the late John Ritchie Findlay, in 1884; the restoration of Dunblane Cathedral, and the building of Mount Stuart House for the Marquess of Bute, are Sir Rowand's most important works during the later decades of the nineteenth century; but contemporaneously with these he carried out restorations of the Abbeys of Paisley and Culross, and of the Chapel, King's College, Aberdeen.

To this period also belong most of his decorative monuments and memorials, such as that to Montrose in St Giles', Edinburgh, and those to the Duke of Buccleuch and Dean Ramsay in Parliament Square and Princes Street. Sir Rowand Anderson was keenly interested in everything bearing on Scottish Architecture, and alongside a professional activity rarely surpassed in any of the Arts, by strength of will and purpose he did much towards the raising of the status of the profession north of the Tweed.

He had been elected an Associate of the Academy in 1876, but in 1883, as a protest against the neglect of Architecture in the elections to premier rank, he resigned his position and thereby led a few years later to the Mother of the Arts being assigned a more proportionate representation in both ranks. This was recognised by the Academy when, in 1896, Sir Rowand was elected an Honorary Member.

Later he was intimately associated with the establishment of the School of Applied Art, which, before it was merged in the present College of Art, did much valuable work in the training, not of Architects only, but of those engaged in the Arts and Crafts generally. Sir Rowand acted on the first Board of Management of the Art College.

His enthusiasms for things Scottish and for his Art were conjoined in a long cherished ideal of an independent National Society of Architecture, an ideal which, in 1916, was brought to being on his initiative and through his generosity in providing an endowment in the present Institute of Scottish Architects. He was its first President, and continued until his death to take an active part in directing its affairs. In token of their appreciation the members of the Institute offered for his acceptance a portrait bust in bronze by Dr.

Macgillivray, but though the clay model was completed, his death intervened before it could be cast and formally presented.

Already, as has been seen, honoured by the University, the Academy, and Royalty, Sir Rowand, in 1916, received the highest recognition open to a British Architect, when he was awarded the Royal Gold Medal, a distinction conferred annually on the one of European reputation considered most worthy of it by his fellows in the Royal Institute of British Architects.

He died at his residence, Allermuir, Colinton, on 1st June.