OBITUARY

Dr William Hogarth Robertson Nimmo, CBE, DE, MCE who was born on 10 February, 1885, died on 7 May, 1970.

Born in England of Australian parents, he was educated at Cumloden School, East St Kilda, Melbourne, and from 1902–06 studied engineering at Melbourne University, taking a BCE degree. Later he received his MCE.

Nimmo was to make his name as an hydraulic engineer, specializing in dams and water supplies. After early experience as a designer and draughtsman in Victoria and Queensland, and a trip to Canada and the USA, he spent ten formative years in Tasmania (1913–23), at first as a draughtsman to the PWD in Hobart under W. T. Fowler, where he designed and supervised construction of the first arch dam and the first r.c. bridge in Tasmania. In 1918 he became Assistant Engineer in the Hydro-Electric Department, under the Chief Engineer, Sir John Butters, carrying out investigations to determine yield of catchment areas and the capacity of canals and storages required in connexion with the Great Lake hydro-electric power scheme. He was also engaged on preliminary designs for the Great Lake Dam before becoming in 1919 Resident Engineer of the River Ouse diversion of the Great Lake power scheme, including headworks and an r.c. flume half a mile long. Due to the climate, work was largely confined to the summer months, and the remoteness of the site made it necessary for the Department to provide housing and amenities for the 500 men employed there. Under A. H. Bastow, Nimmo was in complete charge of location, construction and control of the settlement. In 1921 he became principal assistant for hydraulic design in the hydro-electric department, under G. C. Halkyard.

It is a measure of his success that while still in his thirties, he was appointed Civil Engineer to the Metropolitan Water Supply and Sewerage Board, Brisbane, in charge of construction of some 350 miles of reticulation sewers (cost £400 000), including the laying of a submerged flexible main across the Brisbane River (1924–26). In 1926 he became Designing Engineer to the Main Roads Commission, Queensland, responsible for designs and estimates for road construction to the value of £1 million annually—a testing assignment which he continued to hold until 1934. For the last two years of this period he was also a member of the Special Committee of the Bureau of Industry appointed to investigate and report on Brisbane's water supply and flood prevention measures.

But perhaps his greatest challenge was the Stanley River Somerset Dam, of which he was appointed Designing Engineer in 1935, later becoming Chief

Engineer. A concrete gravity dam, 163 ft high, involving 300 000 cu. yd concrete, it included four 90 in. needle valves, eight high pressure 12 ft × 8 ft sluice gates and eight 26 ft × 23 ft crest gates. On this monumental work he continued until 1949 (the dam was not actually completed for another ten years), but this did not prevent him becoming involved in other commitments at the same time. From 1939–49 he was Coordinator-General of Public Works, responsible during this period for the design and construction of Cairncross Dock.*

In 1950 Nimmo was offered the post of Commissioner for Irrigation and Water Supply, Queensland, where he continued until his retirement five years later. From 1955 until his death he was retained as Engineer-Consultant to the Government of Queensland, and also engaged in some private work, usually of an advisory nature.

In recognition of his distinguished services to engineering and to Queensland, Dr Nimmo was made a CBE in 1962. He undertook research into the relation of run-off to rainfall and losses from catchment areas in Australia, becoming a known authority in the field of hydrology. In 1956 the University of Melbourne awarded him the Kernot Memorial Medal, and in 1963 the University of Queensland conferred on him a doctorate in engineering—the first to be awarded by this body.

He played a major part in the affairs of the Institution of Engineers, Australia, of which he was a founder-member, becoming Chairman of their Brisbane Division in 1937. For 20 years he had a seat on their Council and in 1949 became President. A year later he was awarded the Peter Nicol Russell Memorial Medal, and in 1960 elected an honorary member. In addition he was from 1948–61 Chairman of the Australian National Committee on Large Dams. A Fellow of the American Society of Civil Engineers, he was a member of the American Geophysical Union.

He was author of several papers, and in his Presidential Address to the Institution of Engineers, Australia, spoke on 'The World's Water Supply, and Australia's portion of it' (*J. IE Aust.*, Vol. 21, No. 3, March, 1949). To the American Society of Civil Engineers he presented 'Side Spillways for regulating Diversion Canals' (ASCE, Vol. 92).

Among civil engineers in Australia, Dr Nimmo had a considerable reputation. His tenacity and judgement were remarkable, and his achievements speak for themselves.

He was on the Institution's Roll for 58 years. Elected a corporate member in 1912, he was transferred to the senior grade in 1931.

He is survived by his widow, a daughter, and a son, Dr D. B. Nimmo.

---

* Work on Cairncross Dock was held up until it became possible to store in Somerset Dam enough water to supply Brisbane and Ipswich in the event of their reservoirs being damaged by enemy action.