

## GOVERNMENT NOTIFICATION.—No. 210.

The following Papers regarding the New Post Office were laid before the Legislative Council on the 10th instant, and are published.

By Command,

J. H. STEWART LOCKHART,  
*Colonial Secretary.*

Colonial Secretary's Office, Hongkong, 11th April, 1902.

## NEW POST OFFICE BUILDING.

18th March, 1898.

On this date and referring to previous correspondence, the Governor reported to the Secretary of State (No. 78) the Legislative Council's unanimous resolution of 28th February, that the new Law Courts and accessory offices should be erected on reclamation plot 2 in front of the City Hall and that the site of the present General Post Office and Supreme Court be reserved for erection of a new General Post Office which should also afford accommodation for such other Government Offices as might be decided on. The Governor proposed:—

- (a) preparation of designs for the new Law Courts and accessory offices by the Consulting Architects, and on their receipt to prepare estimates locally and invite tenders; and
- (b) that plans for the new G. P. O. be prepared locally.

He proceeded to refer to D. P. W.'s (Mr. ORMSBY's) preliminary views as to which offices could be accommodated with the G. P. O. He stated that an estimate for a three storied building on the present G. P. O. and Supreme Court site was put at \$130,000. The Governor then went into the question of the Colony's ability to meet the expenditure involved, and hoped that the Secretary of State would be satisfied on that head and approve of the proposals. A report of the proceedings in Legislative Council and report by the Director of Public Works, also papers on the financial side of the question were enclosed.

C.O.D. 186/98.

On 22nd July, 1898, the Secretary of State, in reply to the Governor's despatch No. 78 of 18th March, 1898, approved of the preparation of plans locally for the new Post Office and other offices, but asked for further information as to the financial ability of the Colony to meet the expenditure involved in view of the effect on the revenue from Land Sales of the decision to limit the terms of Crown Leases.

6th October, No. 285.

The Governor reported to the Secretary of State as regards the financial question that he did not think the revenue from Land Sales would be seriously affected.

On the discussion of the plans of the new Supreme Court, Mr. MAY suggested putting the G. P. O. on the ground floor and Supreme Court above, thereby releasing the valuable site of the present G. P. O., but the Director of Public Works advanced objections and the Governor decided not to re-open the matter.

November, 1898.  
C.S.O. 2812.

On 23rd November, the Director of Public Works submitted a proposal that the Government should exchange the site of the present G. P. O., etc., with Messrs. JARDINE, MATHESON & Co., for a site occupied by their offices in front of the present building at the corner of Des Vœux Road and Pedder's Street, and the Government welcomed the suggestion as providing a solution of this troublesome matter, but the negotiations fell through, and it remained, therefore, to face the question of re-erecting the G. P. O. on its present site which involved the necessity of finding temporary accommodation.

The Executive Council advised the erection of a three-storied building on the present site of the G. P. O. and Law Courts to accommodate a new G. P. O., Treasury, Local Auditor's Office, Registrar General's Office, Education Department and Sanitary Board Office, and that competitive designs be invited locally. Thereupon the Director of Public Works formulated particulars and conditions and suggested raising the estimate to \$175,000. The matter, however, remained in abeyance owing to the impossibility of finding temporary accommodation and until the new Supreme Court came to be completed.

20th March, 1899.  
(C. S. O. 3812/98.)

6th October, 1899.

In September, 1901, the matter took a fresh start when the Colonial Secretary (Mr. STEWART LOCKHART) proposed the reclamation in front of Messrs. JARDINE, MATHESON & Co., on the Praya, as a site. The Director of Public Works was all in favour of this site as being the most convenient position possible, near present building so still central, and near the principal landing place. The new proposal came before Executive Council on 17th October, 1901, and it advised submitting the matter to the Secretary of State. This course was followed on 9th January, 1902, in a despatch No. 9 which reviewed the intricate history of the question which first came up in 1894, explained the many advantages of the proposed Praya site over all others, which advantages were held to fully compensate the Government for the additional cost involved. A telegraphic reply was asked for as Messrs. JARDINE, MATHESON & Co. were only willing to allow the Government the refusal of the offer of the land for two months. It was suggested that Sir H. A. BLAKE be consulted.

27th September, 1891.  
(C.S.O. 2921/01.)

17th October, 1901.

9th January, 1902.

On this date the Secretary of State telegraphed approval, and on the 22nd February, the Officer Administering the Government proposed to take over the land forthwith and to invite competitive designs locally as the staff of the Public Works Department was not sufficient to undertake the work and as delay ought to be avoided.

15th February, 1902.

22nd February, 1902.

The Secretary of State replied that this might be done.

23rd March, 1902.

The Government by letter formally accepted Messrs. JARDINE, MATHESON'S offer.

27th March, 1902.

Steps are now being taken to settle definitely the exact amount of accommodation required by the various offices to be housed in the building to be erected, and the Director of Public Works is preparing the necessary notices inviting competitive designs.

M. J. D.

4th April, 1902.

No. 9.

GOVERNMENT HOUSE,  
HONGKONG, 9th January, 1902.

SIR,

I have the honour to inform you that, for some time past, this Government has had under its consideration a new scheme in connection with the proposed new Post Office, and as the scheme has now been fully matured, I have to submit it for your consideration.

2. The proposal which has hitherto been kept in view, but in connection with which no action has been taken, is that the new Post Office should be built on the site of the present Law Courts. The new proposal, which appears to me to have many advantages over the old, is to erect the Post Office on the reclamation in front of the Offices of Messrs. JARDINE, MATHESON AND COMPANY. This will necessitate the purchase of an expensive site, but, on the other hand, the Government will have as an asset the valuable site upon which the present Post Office and Law Courts now stand.

3. Before laying before you the details of the new scheme, I will recapitulate the somewhat intricate history of the reports and negotiations which have led to its adoption, and in order to elucidate my remarks, I attach a small plan of the City on which are indicated all the various sites which have been selected or considered suitable for the new Post Office, and which are now abandoned in favour of that which I have mentioned.

4. The matter was first dealt with by the Committee appointed by Sir WILLIAM ROBINSON in 1894, which recommended in its report, dated November, 1896, that the Post Office should be erected on a site on the Reclamation. From the Appendix to the report, specifying the conditions of competition subject to which it was proposed to invite designs from Architects, it will be seen that the site, which I have marked "A" on the accompanying plan, was the one selected.

5. Subsequently Messrs. ASTON WEBB and INGRESS BELL, who were appointed Architects for the new Law Courts, selected site "A" as the most suitable for the Courts and recommended that the Post Office should be erected on site "B".

6. This recommendation was referred by His Excellency the Governor to the Public Works Committee, which decided that the existing site marked "C" on plan, was more central and suitable for the purpose than site "B" and would afford the desired accommodation if the area at present occupied by the Courts were added to it.

7. The Committee's proposal, though good in many respects, is open to serious objections, the principal being that excessive delay and inconvenience would be caused in the carrying out of the work.

8. To explain this, I must emphasize the fact that the new Post Office was to embrace the sites of the present Post Office and Supreme Court, and that, at the present time, practically half the ground floor of the Supreme Court is occupied by the Post Office.

9. It will, therefore, be seen that before the construction of a new Post Office can be begun on the existing site, both the Courts and the Post Office must be removed.

10. The removal of the former to the building to be erected upon site "A" will not take place before 1905 at the earliest, nor will its removal render possible the commencement of the new Post Office for the reason mentioned in paragraph 8.

11. It follows, therefore, that, in order to admit of the new Post Office being begun within a reasonable period of time, both the Courts and Post Office (including the Treasury) must be removed to temporary premises. The idea of procuring suitable accommodation otherwise than by erecting temporary buildings must be dismissed because investigations have shown that no suitable buildings are available.

12. Putting aside the inconvenience and expense which would be caused by the erection of temporary buildings, there is the serious risk attached to such a proposal of a fire occurring which might involve irreparable loss.

13. The only other important objection to the proposal is that all Mails arrive or are despatched by steamer and consequently the disadvantages of a Post Office which does not front on the Harbour are very great.

14. Having thus dealt with the sites hitherto recommended, I will now turn to the one (marked "D" on plan) which has recently been put forward.

15. The advantages possessed by this site are undoubtedly great, and it will be observed that its distance from the present Post Office is so inconsiderable that it may be disregarded. They are as follows:—

- (1.) It is on the Harbour Front.
- (2.) It is adjacent to the principal landing place of the City—Blake Pier.

- (3.) It is on the route of the proposed Tramways.
- (4.) It is surrounded on 3 sides by main streets all of which are 75 feet in width.
- (5.) It possesses the further advantage that no interference will be caused with the working of the Office, which can continue to occupy the present building until the new one has been completed.

16. The only disadvantages it possesses are that the land must be purchased from its present owner and that the cost of the foundations will be greater on this site than on the present one.

17. With regard to these disadvantages, I have ascertained from Messrs. JARDINE, MATHESON & Co. that Sir ROBERT JARDINE is prepared to sell the area, which comprises 25,414 square feet, at \$20 per square foot, or at a total cost of \$508,280.

18. As the site of the existing Post Office, Courts, &c., would be rendered available for sale by the transfer to site "D," the Colony would be recouped for this outlay.

19. After providing for the construction of a public street in order to develop the land, for the purpose of which a certain area of private property must be acquired, there will remain an area of 38,942 square feet for sale, the value of which is estimated at \$629,328. From this must be deducted the cost of resuming the area just mentioned, which is estimated at \$80,000, leaving the net return from the sale of the land \$549,328.

20. With regard to the extra cost of the foundations, this may be taken at about \$60,000, as an offset against which there is the avoidance of the cost of temporary buildings and of the dislocation of the work which must inevitably result from attempting to utilize the existing site.

21. It will, therefore, be seen that the advantages of adopting the new site are very great and may be regarded as fully compensating for the additional cost which would be involved in carrying out the proposal.

22. In submitting the above scheme for your consideration, I have the honour to request that you will inform me of your decision in the matter as soon as possible by telegraph, as Messrs. JARDINE, MATHESON & Co. have intimated in the letter, of which I enclose a copy, that they will allow the Government to have the refusal of their offer for only two months, and that they desire to be informed as promptly as possible of its acceptance or decline.

23. As Sir HENRY BLAKE is fully acquainted with the details of the scheme, I have the honour to suggest that you should apply to him for any information or explanation you require during his absence in England.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your most obedient, humble Servant,

W. J. GASCOIGNE,  
Major-General,  
Administering the Government.

The Right Honourable  
JOSEPH CHAMBERLAIN, M.P.,

&c. &c. &c.