

Inform you that arrangements have been made for the Engineer-in-Chief to relieve you from your duties in connection with public buildings during the above period, and to request that you will be good enough to have the transfer effected forthwith." There is nothing in this correspondence to indicate the nature of the conditions stated or implied in the agreement referred to by Mr Bell, and no record of this agreement can be found in the Public Works Department, but from the memorandum dated the 26th June, 1890, addressed to the Hon. Minister for Public Works by Mr Bell, a copy of which is attached to his memorandum to the Under-Secretary for Defence, it appears that as the result of certain conversations with Ministers it was arranged that Mr Bell was to transfer the works in connection with public buildings to the Engineer-in-Chief, and devote his whole time to harbour defences for six months, as directed by the Hon. Minister for Public Works, and that his salary should be £600 per annum during the continuance of such services in the Defence Department.

In this memorandum Mr Bell also referred to the letter of the 11th July, 1885, "not yet superseded," by which the late Government notified the transfer of his entire services to the Defence Department, and the Engineer-in-Chief states that he is directed to inform Mr Bell that should the defence works cease at any time his position in the Public Works Department would not be prejudiced. Regarding which communication Mr Bell says, "I venture, therefore, to assume that it is the intention of the present Government that the conditions of the now transfer similarly of my entire services to the Defence Department shall, should the defence works cease at any time, equally preserve the right of return to a position in the Public Works Department, or otherwise in the Government service, the rank and pay of which shall fairly recognise the responsibilities and grade of officers which have recently been intrusted to me. May I respectfully ask yourself, Sir, and the Hon. Minister for Defence, to say whether this is throughout a correct interpretation of the position."

This is minuted as in margin by the Hon. Mr Fergus, Minister for Public Works, Hon. Mr Russell, Minister of Defence, and Mr W N Blair, Engineer-in-Chief and it is a somewhat singular circumstance that an important official communication of this kind, addressed to the Minister for Public Works and referred to the Engineer-in-Chief, should not have been filed among the records of the Public Works Department, together with some explanation of what was actually understood by the Minister and Engineer-in-Chief to be the nature and extent of the obligation undertaken by the department with regard to Mr Bell's future position in the Government service. It is ascertained, however, that Mr A. W. D. Bell, who, previous to the 11th July, 1885, held the position of Assistant Engineer in the Public Works Department at a salary of £300 per annum, was, on that date, transferred to the Defence Department as "Resident Engineer for Defence," with a salary of £400 per annum, at the same time being assured by memorandum from Mr Blackett, Engineer-in-Chief, that the acceptance of this office in the Defence Department would not, if the defence works should cease at any time, prejudice his position in the Public Works Department. From that time to the present Mr Bell has continued to be "Engineer for Defences," and when, about 1889, it was decided by the Government to construct a separate department for the control of public buildings and domains, he was made "Engineer-in-Charge of Buildings" in conjunction with the position of "Engineer for Defences," both of which offices were held by him until the 21st July, 1890, at which time the Engineer-in-Chief resumed the control of the works in connection with public buildings, and Mr. Bell was instructed to devote his whole attention to harbour defences for the next six months, there was consequently no second transfer of Mr Bell's services to the Defence Department, the only transfer at this time being the handing back to the Engineer-in-Chief the charge of works connected with Public Buildings, the management of which was resumed by the Public Works Department.

It may therefore be inferred that what was intended by the Ministers and Mr Blair when they minuted Mr Bell's memorandum of the 26th June, 1890, was to reassure him that the terms stated in Mr Blackett's memorandum of the 11th July, 1895, when he was transferred to the Defence Department, would be adhered to, and that in the event of the defence works ceasing in six months' time, as appears to have been anticipated, Mr Bell would be placed in a position in the Public Works Department as engineer of equal rank to that held by him at the time of the transfer on the 11th July, 1885, together with all reasonable promotions and increases of salary that would naturally have been accorded to him if he had remained for the whole of the time an engineer of the Public Works Department with increasing duties and responsibilities, and not, as implied by Mr. Bell, that on his devoting his entire attention to the harbour defence works for six months he would, in the event of these works ceasing at about that time, be entitled to receive an appointment in the Public Works Department, or elsewhere in the public service, the rank and pay of which would place him in a position superior to many officers, professional and otherwise, in the department who had been considerably longer in the service than Mr Bell, and had always performed the most important and responsible duties appertaining to their offices in a manner that was satisfactory to the Government and the public.

For the reasons above stated I consider that it would not be to the advantage of the public service to comply with Mr Bell's demand to be given the rank of District Engineer in the Public Works Department at a salary considerably higher than the rate now received by district and resident engineers at present in the service, as that would be likely to cause grave discontent among the officers holding positions of trust and responsibility in the department, who have equal rights with Mr Bell to expect that their official and professional standing shall not be discredited by a junior being placed in a position above them through the mere accident of his having been detached from the department to conduct a special service of no greater importance than the ordinary business and works of the department on which they have all along been engaged.

WILLIAM H. HALES,  
Engineer-in-Chief.

The Hon. the Minister for Public Works.

*Approximate Cost of Paper.*—Preparation, not given; printing (1,400 copies), £2 11s. 6d.

By Authority: SAMUEL COSTALL, Government Printer, Wellington.—1895.

Price 3d.]