

13. I mean, whether it could be used for part of it?—Yes. Another question would arise there, and that is whether the site is not too valuable for a museum.

JAMES MEACHAM BATHAM examined. (No. 4.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What is your position?—I am Registrar-General of Lands and Deeds.

2. You were asked to come here in order to give any information in your power with regard to your position as regards accommodation now for the business of your Department—whether it is satisfactory, where it is situated, and whether further accommodation is required or not. Where are you located now?—In the Government Insurance Building.

3. How many rooms do you occupy there?—We occupy eleven rooms, including strong-rooms.

4. Do the strong-rooms belong solely to your own Department, or are they used by other Departments?—Solely by our own Department.

5. And you have, how many?—Five strong-rooms.

6. How many officers have you to find accommodation for?—About twenty-eight.

7. Is the accommodation at present provided satisfactory and convenient in every way?—It is not sufficient for the public requirements, and it is very inconvenient for the departmental requirements. We have to deal with the public in very large numbers, at times there being as many as thirty people at the counter and perhaps thirty people searching in the main strong-room.

8. And therefore further accommodation is very urgently required?—Very urgently required. In my opinion, the present accommodation is unsuitable. The Department has outgrown the present accommodation. It was ill-adapted at first, and as the Department has grown rapidly the inconvenience is intensified.

9. And could not further accommodation be obtained within the present building that you are now in?—We got a little further accommodation some four years ago, and I suppose when the Public Trust Office removes from that building we could get more; but it is not conveniently arranged for the head of the office, for the staff, or for the public.

10. Then, even if you did get further accommodation in the present building it would not meet your requirements?—It would not be satisfactory.

11. Then, in the event of accommodation being provided for you in another building elsewhere, what number of rooms would you require?—I think the accommodation should be as absolutely fireproof as possible, and the building should be so made as to amply meet the requirements for very many years ahead. Added-to buildings are not satisfactory; part of the building should be made and let as wanted.

12. Could you give the Committee any idea of how many rooms you would require if a building were erected to-morrow?—I can give the Committee a few figures which will show the rate at which our Department is increasing. There is something of the snowball element about it, because we do not destroy any of the documents, and they go on rapidly increasing automatically. The Department occupies eleven rooms in the Government Insurance Buildings; floor-area of the whole is about 385 square yards, and of this area about 140 square yards is taken up by strong-rooms. Rent paid, £505 per annum; total staff, 28. The following figures will show the increase in the gross revenue of the Land Transfer Office: 1877, £1,743; 1887, £2,891; 1897, £5,670; 1907, £12,763.

13. Then, have you formed any opinion as to the suitability of one of the sites proposed? You have heard what has taken place before the Committee, and one of the sites suggested for the new building is the site recently occupied by the Parliamentary Buildings. Would that be a convenient site for the purpose of the public transacting their business with your Department?—It would be perfectly convenient to the Department, but perhaps it might not be quite satisfactory for the legal profession and the public generally, it being rather far out of the centre of the town. It is almost going back to the old site of the Deeds Registry Office.

14. It would be quite convenient for the Department, at any rate?—Yes.

15. And what is your opinion as to the necessities of the case—do you think it would be safe to put the large number of documents that you have in your charge in a wooden building?—It would be most disastrous if any fire occurred. It is difficult to speak on the subject without appearing to exaggerate the inconvenience which would be caused to the Dominion.

16. Then, you are of opinion that a fireproof building is an absolute necessity?—An absolute necessity, and I do not think the present building is fireproof.

17. You heard what was said just now with regard to the strong-rooms in the Departmental Buildings on Lambton Quay. The last witness spoke of the strong-rooms being quite safe, barring the possibility of the whole building collapsing. Do you think a wooden building with strong-rooms as safe as those would suffice for your purpose, or would it be necessary to have a fireproof building?—I would advise an absolutely fireproof building, and I think it would be economy in the long-run. It would be impossible to measure the inconvenience if a fire occurred in our Department.

18. *Right Hon. Sir J. G. Ward.*] In the building you are now in you are paying rental?—Yes.

19. How much?—£505 per annum.

20. So that a building to meet the specific requirements of your Department, giving you your own accommodation in a fireproof building and your own strong-rooms, and to make provision for an increase even upon the ratio that you have just suggested—the rent that you are paying would be equivalent to 5 per cent. on a £10,000 building?—Yes.

21. Assuming for the purpose of economy that the Government decides to have all the public Departments located either in one fireproof building or in a series of fireproof buildings almost adjoining each other, would it be any more inconvenient from the lawyers' point of view to go to the Parliamentary Buildings site as against the old Departmental Buildings site?—I do not think it would be, and with the tram accommodation it would be very trifling.