

### Chapter 3.

#### Public Patrons.

On joining the Colonial Architect's Office, Barnet would have found that much of its work related to the provision and maintenance of post offices and telegraph stations. Between 1865 and 1890 the Office was responsible for the design, construction and maintenance of 169 such offices scattered throughout New South Wales;<sup>1</sup> buildings which were often the most architecturally satisfying and functionally important in many country towns. Barnet's work in connection with them and his relationship with the Postmaster-General's Department are examined as being illustrative of the manner in which his Office worked with other government departments.

The central dilemma constantly facing Barnet was posed by his dual role of architect and civil servant. The architect was anxious to design buildings which, while ornamental, made the maximum use of space and light; the civil servant was concerned to interpret government decisions and apply civil service procedures in the most efficient and economical manner. This dilemma is further explored in this chapter by considering some of the most prominent buildings with which Barnet was associated.

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1. Abolition of the Office of Colonial Architect (Letter from Mr James Barnet, late Colonial Architect, Respecting), NSW LA V&P 1891/92 (2).

## ii.

A primary decision which must be made by a client seeking the design and construction of a building is that of deciding the use to be made of the proposed accommodation and its allocation between various activities. Inability on the part of the Postmaster-General's Department and the Public Works Department to settle these matters often led to delays in completing projects. In 1875, for example, the Works Department, at that time responsible for the administration of telegraph stations,<sup>2</sup> had sought funds for a telegraph station to be erected at Cooma; later, a decision was taken that the proposed building should also serve as a post office for which the Postmaster-General's Department would be responsible. Revised plans had been approved when an unidentified clerk in the Works Department drew attention to what he believed was insufficient accommodation 'for *postal* purposes'.<sup>3</sup> Another clerk asserted that the office accommodation was adequate but, in his opinion, the residential accommodation was 'rather small'.<sup>4</sup> The plans were again modified and some eighteen months later tenders were invited for the work<sup>5</sup> when another delay arose. The Surveyor-General had not surveyed the proposed site for the building and it was not until June 1877

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2. Between 1857 and 1879 the telegraphic services were under the control of the Secretary for Public Works - G.N. Hawker, *The Parliament of New South Wales 1856-1965*, Sydney, 1970, p.40.
  3. Minute - Department of Works to Secretary, General Post Office, undated - PWD: Special Bundles - Miscellaneous, Part 2, (NSW AO 2/894).
  4. Minute - Department of Works to Colonial Architect, 5 October 1876 - PWD: Special Bundles - Miscellaneous, *loc. cit.*
  5. Under Secretary for Public Works to Colonial Architect, 30 January 1877 - PWD: Special Bundles - Miscellaneous, *loc. cit.*

that this matter was settled and the work was able to proceed.<sup>6</sup>

Barnet's Office had been inconvenienced because the two departments had been dilatory in reaching agreement on the necessary accommodation after the decision was made that the building would serve as both a post office and telegraph station. The Postmaster General's Department had made no provision for funds in the Estimates of Expenditure and had proposed to transfer funds from other approved projects. In addition, there had been a breakdown in liaison between the Surveyor-General and the two departments.

Criticism was sometimes made about the distribution between the two offices of the accommodation provided. At Broughton Creek the telegraph station and the post office occupied a room 118 feet by sixteen feet along with 'operating table, cupboard, and fittings'; that floor space was thought to be 'rather small for the purpose'. Furthermore, there was no privacy for persons who wished to lodge telegrams.<sup>7</sup> This accommodation was superior to that at Wagga Wagga where, as late as 1889, the telegraph station was condemned as being 'in a very unsatisfactory condition'; new accommodation had not been provided because local contractors were reluctant to tender for the work.<sup>8</sup> At Wee Waa the post office, although 'a splendid improvement to the town', did not feature a verandah and 'the public were obliged to stand in the sun or rain while waiting to attend to their business'.<sup>9</sup>

Much of the blame for these defects lay with the Postmaster-

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6. H.E. Cohen to Secretary for Public Works, 20 June 1877 with minute of Barnet, 23 July 1877 - PWD: Special Bundles - Miscellaneous, *loc. cit.*

7. *T&CJ*, 19 May 1888.

8. *Sydney Mail*, 2 March 1889.

9. *Narrabri Herald*, 21 March 1888. Wee Waa is a small village in north-west NSW where summer temperatures often exceed 100°F.

General's department but the press rarely attempted to apportion criticism. The Boggabri correspondent of the *Town and Country Journal*, for example, was caustic in his condemnation of departmental delays which had occurred in commencing work on the new post office; at the same time, other public works were thought to be both unnecessary and extravagant.<sup>10</sup> He later acknowledged the long delays which had resulted from residents of Boggabri being unable to agree upon a site for the post office.<sup>11</sup>

The citizens of Yass made a more orderly approach to the matter of securing a new post office. In 1877 Michael Fitzpatrick, the local member of Parliament had sought the assistance of John Davies,<sup>12</sup> Postmaster-General but, even so, much discussion took place without agreement being reached on a site. Finally, the Government purchased a site and in so doing ignored the protests of local residents.<sup>13</sup> Barnett was directed to prepare plans which were displayed in the Court House during February 1882. Although the proposed building was thought to be 'an ornament to the town', the accommodation was condemned as being both inadequate and most inconvenient because the business of both the post office and telegraph station would be conducted in a single room.<sup>14</sup>

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10. *T&CJ*, 3 January 1880.

11. *Ibid.*, 8 May 1880.

12. An ironmonger by trade who was Postmaster-General in the Robertson Ministry of August-December 1877 - Bede Nairn, 'Davies, John', *ADB* 4.

13. Henry Dodds to editor, *Yass Courier*, 11 May 1880. Dodds, for example, argued that the building should be placed on a corner block so that the post office would front one street and the telegraph station another.

14. *Yass Courier*, 24 February 1882.

Tenders were then invited and work commenced on the foundations; that work was completed in late August 1882. Barnet quickly responded to a request that he send an officer to Yass so that the work might be passed and the next stage of construction go ahead immediately.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, delays, for which Barnet was not held responsible, did occur when the contractor was unable to procure suitable building materials.<sup>16</sup> He was criticised, however, for having supplied a 'miserable apology for furniture' condemned as being 'entirely inadequate'. His critics also believed that he should have constructed a culvert in front of the building and provided hitching posts.<sup>17</sup> These features were matters for which Barnet's Office was not responsible; the local Municipal Council should have attended to them.

In the meantime, Barnet had completed work on a new post office at Carcoar, 'a fine building worthy of the town and district, instead of a shanty-looking place'.<sup>18</sup> Political intervention delayed this project. Barnet had planned a 'one story erection' on which work had commenced before Saul Samuel<sup>19</sup> visited the town. Complaints were made to him about the design and size of that building and he was asked to substitute plans for a more imposing building which had been prepared by the local postmaster; that request was granted.<sup>20</sup>

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15. *Ibid.*, 12 September 1882.

16. *Ibid.*, 12 December 1882.

17. *Ibid.*, 19 August 1884.

18. *T&CJ*, 22 March 1879. There is no file in the NSW Archives Office dealing with the Carcoar Post Office and Telegraph Station.

19. Samuel was Postmaster-General in the First (1872-1875), Second (1877) and Third (1878-1883) Parkes Ministries - G.F.T. Bergman, 'Samuel, Sir Saul', *ADB* 6.

20. *T&CJ*, 22 March 1879.

Unlike the residents of Carcaor, the citizens of Tamworth believed that the provision of postal and telegraphic facilities in their town had been sadly neglected. Those available were located in 'the vilest brick and mortar structure which was ever flattered with a name by any Government Department'. In contrast, the claim was made that other towns 'of far less importance' were provided with 'new and commodious' Government buildings which carried 'elaborate ornamentation, coats of arms and "such like"'. The editor of the *Tamworth Observer* asked: 'How much longer is Tamworth to grovel at the clay feet of its little-big god, and suffer any and every indignity which may be heaped on it'.<sup>21</sup>

As early as March 1877 funds had been promised for additions to be made to that 'brick and mortar structure'; the work, completed in June 1879, was rejected by local residents as being most unsatisfactory.<sup>22</sup> Barnet would have been the target of their criticism even though the site was one which had been agreed upon with the Postmaster-General's Department and plans prepared in consultation with departmental officers.

In 1882 Barnet's Office commenced work on plans for a new post office and telegraph station for Tamworth. The approved design provided for a brick and cement building executed in the Doric style of architecture. In addition to the office accommodation, suitable residential accommodation had been provided for both the Postmaster and the Telegraph Master together with their families.<sup>23</sup> The editor of the *Tamworth News* praised the 'magnificent' design which was 'a

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21. *Tamworth Observer*, 21 April 1880.

22. Australia Post, 'Tamworth Post Office', pp.1-2.

23. *Tamworth News*, 28 May 1886.

credit to the Department and an ornament to the town'.<sup>24</sup>

Very little time was lost in completion of this project and for this there were probably a number of reasons. The contractor, Cains of Woollahra had executed a number of other Government contracts, and he was already known to the Colonial Architect's Office as being a reliable tradesman. Secondly, with the extension in October 1878 of the northern railway as far as Tamworth, departmental inspectors were able to make frequent and regular surveys of the work in progress. Furthermore, the railway would have reduced delays in transporting building materials to Tamworth.

The Goulburn post office and telegraph station was another project which brought Barnet a great deal of kudos. Unlike Yass, where lengthy arguments had occurred over the site for the post office, or Tamworth, where successive governments were slow to acknowledge the need; few problems arose in relation to the Goulburn offices. Some minor agitation occurred when the Secretary of the General Post Office informed the Town Clerk that the proposed building would be located in a side street. That decision was quickly reversed and a site in the main street substituted.<sup>25</sup>

Work proceeded quickly under a contract awarded to Frederick Horne, a local building contractor, and within eighteen months the new building was officially opened. Shortly before that ceremony, the editor of the *Goulburn Evening Penny Post* inspected 'this noble structure' which, 'from its majestic appearance' was, in his opinion one of the finest buildings in the town. The design, executed in

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24. *Ibid.*, 1 June 1886.

25. R.T. Wyatt, *The History of Goulburn NSW*, Sydney, 2nd edition, 1972, pp.210-11.

the Italian style of architecture, was thought to be 'very neat' and highly appropriate'. Credit was given to 'Mr. Barnett [*sic*]' for a design which 'could hardly ... be improved upon'; maximum use had been made of the accommodation provided and in all the building was both 'useful' and 'ornamental'. This project had demanded close supervision; for that purpose Barnett had engaged a temporary clerk of works who had 'ably and faithfully carried out the work'.<sup>26</sup>

iii.

Barnett was also required to provide post offices and telegraph stations in suburban Sydney. In general, these were small, undistinguished buildings. There were, however, two notable exceptions; at Balmain he erected a public building which was grander than those found in other suburbs whereas that at North Shore was by comparison nondescript, badly-sited and utilitarian in design. Each building included a post office and telegraph station as well as a court house and lock-up.

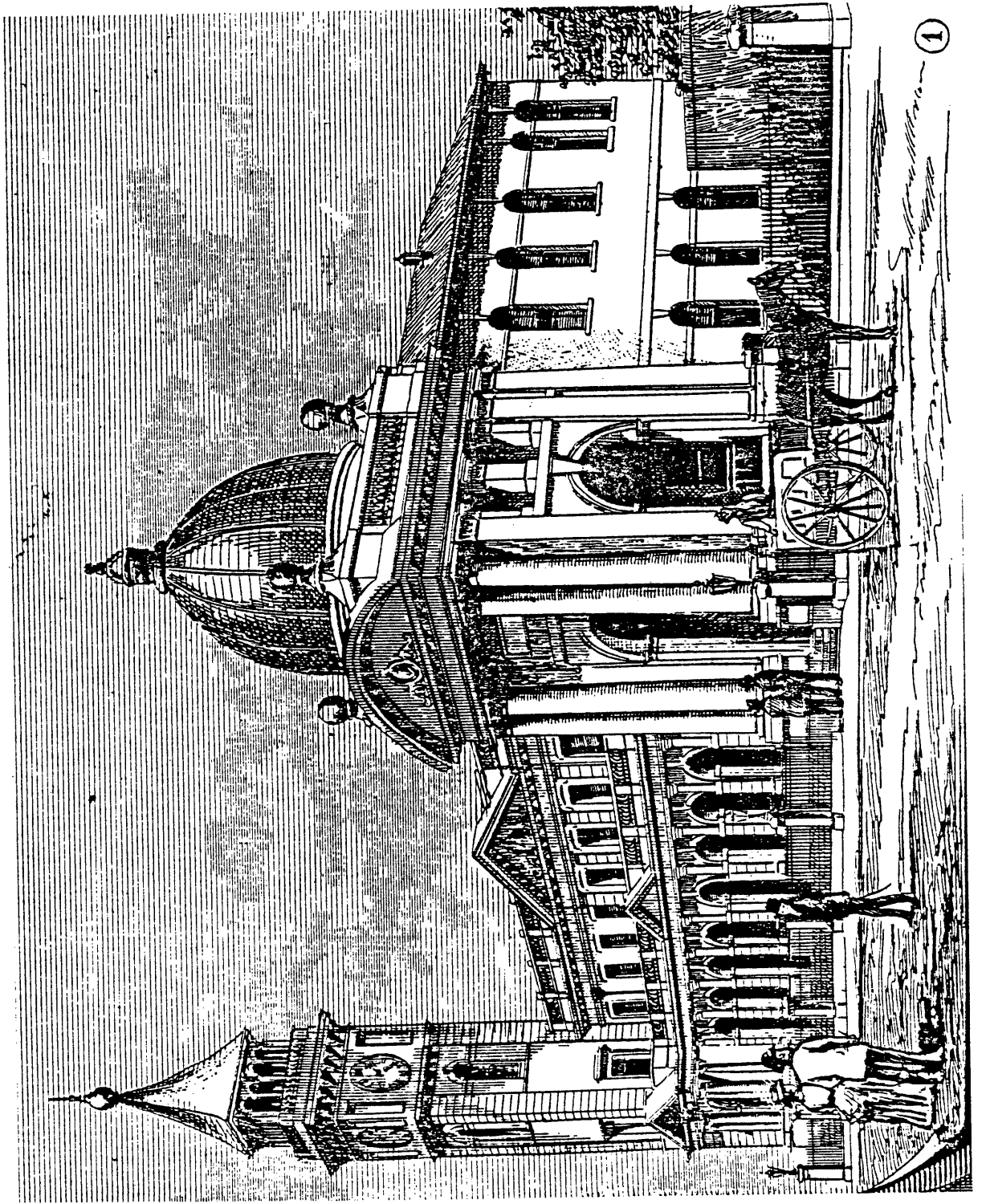
Very little information has been found relating to the Balmain project. The files of the Colonial Architect's Office do not include any relevant papers;<sup>27</sup> the only significant reference to the building reported in the *Sydney Morning Herald* was a description written on

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26. *Goulburn Evening Penny Post*, 12 July 1881.

27. There is a file, 'Public Works Department: Special Bundles - Balmain: Court House, Post and Telegraph Office 1885' (NSW A0 2/895) which provides little information about the project. Plans are located in the Colonial Architect's Office Records (NSW A0 Plan Nos. 655-57).





the occasion of the official opening on 20 August 1887.<sup>28</sup> No reports have been found of the activities of local pressure groups such as those which operated in many country centres.<sup>29</sup>

Although the building had been praised by the *Herald*, Barnet was not spared criticism. The editor of the *Australasian Builders and Contractors' News* pointed out that two towers had been provided which clearly showed that the building had been designed by 'Government officials' and 'paid for out of the State purse'.<sup>30</sup> There was, in fact, one tower which was located at the Post Office section of the building; the court rooms were entered through a portico surmounted by a dome. Allegations that funds may have been wasted on so grand a building could not be sustained but no attempt was made to identify those anonymous 'Government officials', of whom Barnet would have been one, who might be blameworthy. The criticism was not without bias; the *News* represented the interests of private architects and supported their claim to a share of public works. This was not the first occasion as part of that campaign, on which it had denigrated Barnet's work.

The criticism levelled against Barnet regarding the North Shore building was far more serious and of greater significance. In its final report the 1887 Board of Inquiry into the Public Works Department stated that this building had been erected on 'an unsuitable site, which from its shape must necessarily entail a

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28. *SMH*, 22 August 1887.

29. Very few suburban newspapers of the period have survived; for example, the holdings of the Mitchell Library of the *Balmain Independent* and the *Balmain Observer* are incomplete.

30. *ABCN*, 27 August 1887.

wasteful expenditure of public money'. Although conceding that Barnet was 'not altogether responsible for the waste of public money', the Board argued that he had failed in his duty to recommend that the site be not used for a group of public offices.<sup>31</sup>

In a spirited reply, Barnet insisted that he had not been consulted before the purchase was made and thus he had been unable to oppose it. In oral evidence he had stated, and now repeated his statement, that after a decision had been made to utilise the site for public offices, he had been directed to prepare sketch plans for a building which formed the basis for estimates of cost and for tenders. He believed that this may have resulted in additional although not excessive expenditure.<sup>32</sup>

The Commissioners had chosen to ignore that evidence. They offered no explanation for their failure to cross-examine Barnet although that was not possible because Sutherland, as Secretary for Works had prematurely terminated the inquiry. There was some substance in the criticism of the design of the building; although appropriate to the poor site, it was thought to be 'low and mean looking' when compared with similar buildings at either Balmain or Bathurst.<sup>33</sup>

As a group of buildings, post offices and telegraph stations raised a number of problems of which few were of Barnet's making. They were essentially work places in which ornamentation was often sacrificed to utility. The telegraphic equipment was cumbersome,

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31. PWD Board of Inquiry - Final Report of Commissioners of Inquiry, p.26 - NSW LA *v&P* 1887 (2).

32. PWD Board of Inquiry - Remarks by the Colonial Architect on Final Report, p.45 - *loc. cit.*

33. *The Echo*, 2 May 1890.



THE GENERAL POST OFFICE, 1838.

noisy and, if electricity were not readily available, provision must be made to accommodate large banks of electric storage batteries. In addition, steps must be taken to ensure ease of access for the public. Barnet was rarely consulted about the suitability of a particular site; he was expected to make the best use of what he was given. Delays occurred frequently in settling on a site because, as has been shown, of local jealousies and the influence of pressure groups but it was Barnet and 'the Government' who were blamed. In resolving these problems, Barnet provided post offices and telegraph stations which, architecturally, remain the most satisfying buildings found in many country towns. In larger centres, they compared favourably with the splendid court houses and the ornate banking premises which were becoming widespread.

iv.

Barnet's most important buildings were located within the boundaries of the city of Sydney and close by one another - the General Post Office, the Colonial Secretary's Office and the Department of Public Works, the Lands Department and the Custom House. Smaller but important, buildings with which Barnet's Office was associated were the Castlereagh Street headquarters of the Fire Board and the Central Police Court, Liverpool Street. The General Post Office was the first of these monumental buildings to be erected. It was one with which Barnet was associated throughout his civil service career.

The need to provide a new General Post Office with modern facilities had been identified in 1862 when a Board of Inquiry reported that working methods employed in the Post Office could not be improved until such time as it was moved into a building designed to meet the particular needs of the department.<sup>34</sup> Barnet, who had recently joined the Colonial Architect's Office was instructed to prepare designs and plans and within a few weeks he had produced a design for a three-storey building to be executed in the style of the 'Italian Renaissance, of Venetian and Florentine character'.<sup>35</sup> The 'graceful luxuriousness of the Venetian arcades' would be combined with 'the vigour of the Florentine Astylar examples' to create an impression of solidarity and monumental characteristics.<sup>36</sup>

The selected site, centrally located, was narrow and straddled the Tank Stream. The Government owned some of the land and negotiations to acquire the balance were not finalised until July 1864 when approval was given for the work to commence.<sup>37</sup> Before this could be done, the old post office must be demolished, a survey made of nearby buildings and precautions made to protect them from likely damage. A contract for digging the foundations was let in February 1866 and, contrary to Barnet's expectations, this was not completed until May 1867. Delays had occurred because of the proximity

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34. Report of the Board of Inquiry into the Post Office Department, 29 May 1862, p.4 - NSW LA *V&P* 1862 (2).

35. J. Barnet, 'Architectural Work in Sydney, New South Wales, 1788-1899', Royal Institute of British Architects, *Journal* Vol.6, 3rd Series, 29 September 1899, p.514.

36. *SMH*, 20 January 1866. The building was to be bounded by George Street, St. Martin's Lane and Pitt Street.

37. A. Blair to Col. Arch., 27 September 1863 - CAOR: Sydney - General Post Office 1856-66 (NSW AO 2/646).

of the Tank Stream and in gaining vacant possession of land recently acquired in St. Martin's Lane.<sup>38</sup>

On 17 December 1867 a two-year contract was awarded to John Young<sup>39</sup> for the superstructure. This was an unrealistic target; the work was not completed until 8 July 1872.<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, by April 1869 the work was sufficiently advanced to enable Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh to place in position the twenty-six ton keystone of the central arch of the George Street arcade.<sup>41</sup>

Work on this first section was completed by August 1874 and on 1 September the Governor, Sir Hercules Robinson<sup>42</sup> performed the official opening of the building. The Postmaster-General, Saul Samuel praised Barnet's design and complimented the contractor upon the high quality workmanship which had gone into its construction. Barnet, making one of his rarely reported speeches, explained the difficulties he had experienced in having the plans approved and in reaching agreement 'as to the arrangements'; that is, the use and internal planning of the accommodation. He outlined the delays which had arisen during the negotiations for the acquisition of the land and in securing contracts. At the same time, he admitted that the

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38. New General Post Office (Contracts entered into for the erection of the), NSW LA V&P 1873/74 (2). A detailed description of the building was published in *ISN*, 28 November 1868.

39. This was the first public contract awarded to Young after moving to Sydney in 1865 - R. Johnston and A. Roberts, 'Young, John', *ADB* 6.

40. New General Post Office (Contracts), NSW LA V&P 1873/74 (2).

41. *SMH*, 2 April 1869.

42. Governor of NSW, February 1872 - March 1879. An experienced servant of the Crown, he played an important role in the evolution of Responsible government in NSW - B. Nairn, 'Robinson, Sir Hercules George Robert', *ADB* 6.

estimated time for completion of the building (four and a half years) had been greatly exceeded. He said

This seems extraordinary, but no doubt the contractors greatly under-estimated the time required to execute a work of this magnitude, surrounded with so many difficulties, and including so many novelties. Time was spent in quarries and in looking for materials, it being desired to obtain everything if possible in the colony to erect the building ... The introduction of polished granite and the difficulties of foundation and sewerage, together with the scarcity of suitable workmen, and the circumstance that in 1871 it was considered desirable to hurry on the works of harbour defences with all dispatch, workmen from the Post Office were employed for that purpose, that work being considered the less urgent. Later on [1873] the strike in the iron trade caused delay, and kept back the completion of the finishing trade.<sup>43</sup>

A return dated 11 June 1874 of relevant contracts showed that Loveridge's contract for the foundations instead of being completed in six months had taken fifteen; that of Young took four and a half instead of the estimated two years. P.N. Russell and Co's first contract was held up because of tardiness in completing Young's contract; their second contract, dated 2 December 1872 to be completed within nine months, was not finalised in June 1874. By way of explanation, Barnet stated that in December 1872 'the iron trade was

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43. *SMH*, 2 September 1874.



in a very unsettled state, and no employers cared to enter into time agreements'; Russell and Co. had refused to enter into contracts containing penalty clauses which would apply should delays occur in completing the work.<sup>44</sup> Those problems were further exacerbated on 18 October 1873 when the members of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers struck and remained on strike until March 1874.<sup>45</sup>

When contracts contained a penalty clause, there was no reason why Barnet should concern himself with industrial problems except to the extent that they retarded the completion of a contract. Russell and Co's contract did not contain such a clause; Barnet was thus unable to exert pressure upon them or recover additional costs which arose from shortages of materials or industrial action. Nevertheless, he was expected to ensure that such problems did not arise.

Work on the General Post Office proceeded slowly and it was not until the end of 1885 that the project was almost completed although a clock had not yet been installed in the tower. Doubts were being expressed that this task had been abandoned, it having not been included in the original design. Frank Farnell (member for Redfern) understood that there had been some opposition to the proposal to utilise bells in the tower with growing support for the use of tubes. This was denied by John Sutherland, Secretary for Works; Barnet had told him that tests were being made which were showing that the bells were most satisfactory.<sup>46</sup> Sutherland seems to have misunderstood

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44. New General Post Office (Contracts), *loc. cit.*

45. The ironworkers had negotiated an eight-hour day. In terms of earlier agreements, employees were permitted breaks for breakfast and lunch. The employers decided that under the new arrangements an eight-hour day of three periods was objectionable and, without prior consultation, they eliminated one break - T.A. Coghlan, *Labour and Industry in Australia*, Melbourne, reissued 1969, 4 vols., Vol.3, pp.1426-27.

46. NSW *PD* Session 1887-88, First Series, Vol.32, p.5002.

the nature of the tests being made. Some time previously Tornaghi, contractor for the clock and bells, had placed a number of tubular bells in the tower. These were struck repeatedly in a variety of ways and the effects were noted by observers scattered throughout the city.<sup>47</sup>

Allegations were also made that the decision had been delayed because Tornaghi had been 'obstructed by the authorities' which was said to be 'a frequent incident in connection with the carrying-out of a Government contract'. Rumours were widespread that a stalemate had been reached; Tornaghi favoured tubular bells whereas Barnet insisted on the use of conventional bells. Furthermore, the experiment with the tubular bells was reported as having proved to be a failure.<sup>48</sup> The Postmaster-General, Daniel O'Connor<sup>49</sup> now entered the controversy by seeking a report from Barnet. In addition, he was said to have asked Tornaghi to explain why the work had not been completed. The *Sydney Morning Herald* pointed out that, on the one hand, Tornaghi believed that the tower would collapse under the weight of the proposed bells while believing that the tubular bells were superior in both tone and strength. On the other hand, Barnet was said to have argued that they were inferior and failed to satisfy the terms of the contract. At the same time, he dismissed Tornaghi's allegations about the tower as 'ridiculous'.

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47. *ABCN*, 5 May 1888.

48. *Australian Star*, 10 June 1889.

49. Member for West Sydney, 1877-1891; later a member of the Legislative Council. He was Postmaster-General in the short-lived Robertson Ministry (December 1885 - February 1886) and the fifth Parkes Ministry (1889-1891) - M. Lyons, 'O'Connor, Daniel', *ADB* 5.

When the tests were made, the only tubular bells used were those which marked off the quarters; Tornaghi had not imported a bell which would be a substitute for the five-ton hour bell. On the evening of the test Barnet, accompanied by one of his officers and Tornaghi, went to a spot in Hyde Park equidistant from the General Post Office and the Town Hall. Barnet later reported that, after comparing the bells of the Town Hall with his tubular bells, Tornaghi admitted defeat. Barnet had then reported against the substitution of tubular bells.<sup>50</sup>

A few days later, a report was circulated that the Secretary for Works, Bruce Smith<sup>51</sup> had met Harry Daly, contractor for the Town Hall clock, to whom the contract would be offered should Tornaghi fail to call on Smith. Daly denied that rumour while taking the opportunity to outline problems inherent in the original contract which, in his opinion, were to some extent of Barnet's making. Daly believed that the specification was 'valueless and unworkable' and he had pointed out a number of 'most vital omissions'. The specification was, in his opinion, 'ridiculously stringent and pedantic - so much so that only one English firm among the best makers dared to compete'.

He admitted that his tender, although lower than Tornaghi's, had been unsuccessful. Undeterred, he had pursued the matter until that contract was cancelled and fresh tenders were invited; once again, Tornaghi was preferred. Finally, arguing that there were 'no workable and satisfactory conditions and specifications in the

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50. *SMH*, 12 June 1889.

51. Member for Gundagai (1880-82), The Glebe (1889-91), Secretary for Public Works (1889-91) and Colonial Treasurer (1891) in the fifth Parkes Ministry - A.W. Martin and P. Wardle, *Members of the Legislative Assembly of New South Wales 1856-1901*, Canberra, 1959.

original contract', Daly next demanded that Tornaghi's contract be again cancelled and new tenders invited 'under reasonable and workable specifications' predetermined or submitted by each tenderer and referred to an expert who would assess their suitability.<sup>52</sup> His persistence was not rewarded at first; Tornaghi was to be allowed to complete the work but, having failed to so do his contract was cancelled, fresh tenders were invited and Daly was now awarded the contract.<sup>53</sup>

Barnet had finally won out; the bells as described in his original specification were installed. On 16 September 1891 in the presence of a distinguished gathering which included Barnet, the Countess of Jersey, wife of the Governor of New South Wales 'set the chimes in motion by means of a wire attachment at two minutes to 12' and expressed a hope 'that the chimes would always mark happy notes for the people of Sydney, and keep both time and tune'.<sup>54</sup>

Those chimes rang out a message of hope for Robert Garran who wrote:

Ring forth, ye bells, begin to chime;  
 Ring in the right, ring out the wrong;  
 We've waited patiently and long,  
 Ring, welcome bells, its nearly time.

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Ring night and day, with clarion clang;  
 Ring in the good; ring out the ill;  
 But don't, as some folks say you will,  
 Ring down the tower in which you hang.<sup>55</sup>

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52. Henry Daly to editor, *SMH*, 22 June 1889.

53. *The Echo*, 17 April 1890.

54. *SMH*, 17 September 1891.

55. R.R. Garran, 'The Post Office Bells', *Evening News*, 30 June 1891. Garran's model was Alfred Tennyson's 'In Memoriam', the first verse of which was inscribed on the bells.

## v.

While work was progressing on the General Post Office, Barnet had been occupied with other major city buildings which in similar ways presented an architectural challenge fraught with political dangers. The Colonial Secretary's Office, on the corner of Macquarie and Bridge Streets with the Public Works Department forming a wing of that building, and the Lands Department, Bridge Street were tributes to nineteenth century progress, prosperity and respectability; they also served as a monument to Barnet, the Colonial Architect.

The Colonial Secretary's Office was the first major public building completed in Sydney after Barnet became Colonial Architect; the extensions forming the Public Works Department and the Lands Department were finished after he had retired.

The plans for the Colonial Secretary's Office had been prepared during 1869 but the project was delayed for some years. In 1874 the foundations were prepared and construction commenced. Four years later that work was almost completed and suggestions were made that the building should serve as one of those being planned for the International Exhibition to be held in 1879-1880.<sup>56</sup>

Statues of Queen Victoria and Edward, Prince of Wales were to be placed in the Macquarie and Phillip Street entrances with an allegorical representation of New South Wales set in the Bridge Street entrance. Giovanni Fontana, a London sculptor who had displayed work at the International Exhibition was invited to prepare sketch models. Those sketches impressed Barnet as being the work of

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56. *ISN*, 6 September 1879. For a description of the building see *Ibid.*, 14 July 1869.

'an artist of known ability' and he recommended that Fontana be commissioned to undertake the work. Fontana would be required to prepare full-scale models of each figure for the approval of a competent judge before the final figures were cast.<sup>57</sup> The statues, six feet in height and carved in Carrara marble, were to be completed within 'as nearly two years as possible' after he returned to London.<sup>58</sup>

In July 1881, Fontana reported that his models had been approved by the New South Wales Agent-General, Sir Saul Samuel<sup>59</sup> and he now planned to ship them to Florence so that he might procure 'better marble and assistance' being anxious 'that the work should give satisfaction to the Colonial Government, and be a credit to [himself]'.<sup>60</sup> Barnet shared his concern. Unable to inspect the models himself and anxious to have a second opinion about their merit, he urged Sir Henry Parkes, who was about to travel abroad, to find time to visit Fontana's studio in order to impress upon the artist the need for correct details in the features of the Queen and the Prince as well as those of the robes and jewels worn 'so as to make them reliable as historical sculptures as well as high class works of fine art'.<sup>61</sup>

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57. Barnet to Under Secretary for Public Works, 6 February 1880 - Statues Ordered by Sir Henry Parkes (Arrangements), NSW LA V&P 1883/84 (11).
58. Barnet to Under Secretary for Public Works, 8 March 1880 - Statues Ordered by Sir Henry (Parkes), *loc. cit.*
59. Samuel had been appointed Agent-General for New South Wales in London on 10 August 1880 in which position he showed himself to be an 'energetic, shrewd and efficient representative' - G.F.J. Bergman, 'Samuel, Sir Saul', ADB 6.
60. Fontana to Col. Sec., 15 July 1881 - Statues Ordered by Sir Henry Parkes - *loc. cit.*
61. Barnet to Henry Parkes, 29 December 1881 - Parkes Correspondence, Vol.6, pp.29-30 (ML CY A876). When completed, the statues were exhibited in London where they were favourably noted - SMH, 19 April 1884.

This emphasis on realism reveals Barnet's attitude towards art; that is, art might portray abstract concepts in allegorical forms or it could be a visible record of people and historical events through the faithful reproduction of the subject matter. As has been shown in the statues for the Colonial Secretary's Office, he frequently employed both symbolic and realistic art forms.

Provision had been made in the external decoration of the building for statues to be placed in niches set at each corner and representing 'Science', 'Art', 'Justice' and 'Wisdom'. The task was assigned to Achille Simonetti.<sup>62</sup> The last figure in the group of statues, 'Art', when placed in position was described as being 'very beautifully executed with graceful drapery, showing to perfection the contour of the figure'. The group, as a whole, was said to reflect 'the highest credit on the sculptor, who [had] already earned a well-deserved reputation' in Sydney.<sup>63</sup> While agreeing that 'Art' and 'Science' were works of artistic merit, de Libra in 1899 condemned the group as being 'neither satisfactory nor worthy of the sculptor's powers'.<sup>64</sup> As Colonial Architect, Barnet had ignored de Libra's opinions; in retirement, he continued to do so.

By 1889 the departments and branches occupying the building were once again in need of additional office accommodation. On

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62. Simonetti had settled in Sydney in 1874. His clients consisted of 'anyone ... who could raise the price of a bust ... to immortalize his temporal form in marble' - G. Sturgeon, *The Development of Australian Sculpture 1788-1975*, London, 1978, p.35. See also, Noel S. Hutchison, 'Simonetti, Achille', *ADB* 6.

63. *Australian Star*, 14 January 1888.

64. J.G. de Libra, 'The Fine Arts in Australasia. Their Progress, Position and Prospects', *Australasian Art Review*, 1 July 1899, p.19.

11 December, Barnet was directed to prepare plans to extend the Public Works section with construction to commence immediately those plans were approved.<sup>65</sup> Tenders were called on 7 March 1890. Bruce Smith had directed that tenders should be invited for a building having either a brick and cement or stone front. In this manner, prospective tenderers would be given an opportunity to show, as was claimed, that stonemason's work could be executed 'at exceptionally low rates'.<sup>66</sup> That claim was found to be unsound; a tender was let on 4 April for a building of brick and cement with a stone facade matching the earlier section of the building.

On 26 April 1890 the editor of the *Building and Engineering Journal* reported a rumour that the plans for the additions had been prepared by an architect in practice in Hunter Street without the matter being put out to tender. The editor doubted that Bruce Smith 'would have permitted this, without availing himself of all the available talent, in an architectural competition for such an important work'.<sup>67</sup> The rumour was without substance and the comment of the editor naive. In the first place, the New South Wales Government traditionally did not conduct architectural competitions. Secondly, the editor would have been aware that the design of public buildings was a function of Barnet's Office and he would oppose any change in those arrangements. Nevertheless, there was a possibility that changes would be made shortly. In the first place, Barnet was

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65. Under Secretary for Public Works to Col. Arch., 11 December 1889 - PWD: Correspondence re Accommodation, Public Works Building (NSW AO 2/893).

66. *The Echo*, 1 March 1890.

67. Architects in practice in Hunter Street were Dowd and Dobbie, G.W. Durrell, J.S. Hannan, Loweish and Moorhouse, J. Smedley and H.A. Wilshire - *Sand's Sydney Directory 1890*.



now in his sixty-third year and there was the possibility of his being retired soon. Secondly, the Parkes Ministry in December 1887 had announced that the Public Works Department, 'which [had] long outgrown itself' would be re-organised with a transfer of some functions elsewhere.<sup>68</sup> Parkes was again in office and, as will be shown later, some re-distribution of the functions of the Colonial Architect's Office had already made. Furthermore, there was a strong rumour afoot that Barnet's position was to be abolished.<sup>69</sup> The editor was directing his comments towards the Secretary for Public Works who was known to be sympathetic towards private architects.<sup>70</sup>

Before the work was completed, approval was given to connect the two buildings by means of a 'substantial archway carrying four stories over the carriage way with arcaded balconies';<sup>71</sup> a clear direction was that any decoration must be 'plain, substantial, and good' and without 'useless decoration'.<sup>72</sup>

Barnet had by now retired and the project was no longer of immediate interest to him. He may have been interested in a proposal

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68. NSW PD Session 1887-88, First Series, Vol.29, p.1797.

69. *ABCN*, 5 April 1890.

70. Bruce Smith was committed to the notion that private enterprise and the rights of property must be respected and preserved; he rejected the notion of undue interference by the State - see for example, *Liberty and Liberalism - A Protest Against the Growing Tendency Towards Undue Interference by the State, With Individual Liberty, Private Enterprise, and the Rights of Property*, Melbourne, 1887.

71. Officer-in-charge, Colonial Architect's Branch to Under Secretary for Public Works, 16 July 1890 - PWD: Correspondence re Accommodation, *loc. cit.*

72. Minute of Cabinet (No 90/3656), 31 July 1891 - PWD: Correspondence re Accommodation, *loc. cit.*

made by his successor, Walter L. Vernon<sup>73</sup> that the principal building should be extended by means of an additional floor. On examination it was found that the existing walls, reduced in thickness as an economy measure with Barnet's concurrence, would require strengthening and, because of the cost, the plan was abandoned. Vernon next suggested that, because of the extensions being made to its Phillip Street facade 'some compensating additions' should be made to the principal building in the form of a pavilion roof.<sup>74</sup> This suggestion was adopted but, being informed that it would cost £12 000, Bruce Smith referred it to a board of referees.

In its report the Board was critical of Barnet although he was not identified. It had concluded that the cost of the work proposed had resulted from substandard work passed during the original construction. As originally designed, the roof was 'quite impracticable' and this, together with 'other causes not foreseen by Vernon meant that the calculations had been 'completely upset'. The Board hastened to assure Bruce Smith that Vernon had not been responsible for that poor workmanship.<sup>75</sup>

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73. Vernon was appointed Government Architect from 1 August 1890. He had trained as an architect in London and in 1883 he migrated to New South Wales - *The Echo*, 30 July 1890. For an examination of his influence as Government Architect see P. Moroney, 'Walter Vernon: A Change in the Style of Government Architecture' in A. Bradley and T. Smith (ed.), *Australian Art and Architecture: Essays Presented to Bernard Smith*, Melbourne, 1980, pp.45-53.

74. Vernon to Under Secretary for Public Works, 16 June 1891 - PWD: Correspondence re Accommodation, *loc. cit.*

75. Recommendations of Board of Referees, 6 October 1891 - PWD: Correspondence re Accommodation, *loc. cit.* The members of the Board were C.W. Darley, Engineer-in-chief, Harbours and Rivers Branch and Lieut-Colonel F.R. de Wolski, Officer-in-charge, Military Works Branch, Department of Public Works.

Further additions were later made to the building. In Barnet's opinion, these destroyed its simple outline and were in conflict with his original design.<sup>76</sup>

Work was also progressing on the Lands Department where Barnet once again worked with John Young. A site selected in 1876 was partly occupied by an old building which was to be demolished before the site was completed. The building, as planned by Barnet's Office, was to be the largest public building in New South Wales. The style of architecture to be employed was Italian Renaissance 'somewhat of the Venetian type'. Provision was made for 'a massive rusticated basement'; 'boldly recessed arcades' would provide passageways 'while sheltering the windows, and giving play of light and shade in the building'. Pilasters and entablatures in the Doric, Ionic and Corinthian orders of architecture would decorate the upper floors. A copper dome would dominate the Bridge Street front with a tall clock tower, surmounted by an observatory dome, standing on the southern end of the building.<sup>77</sup>

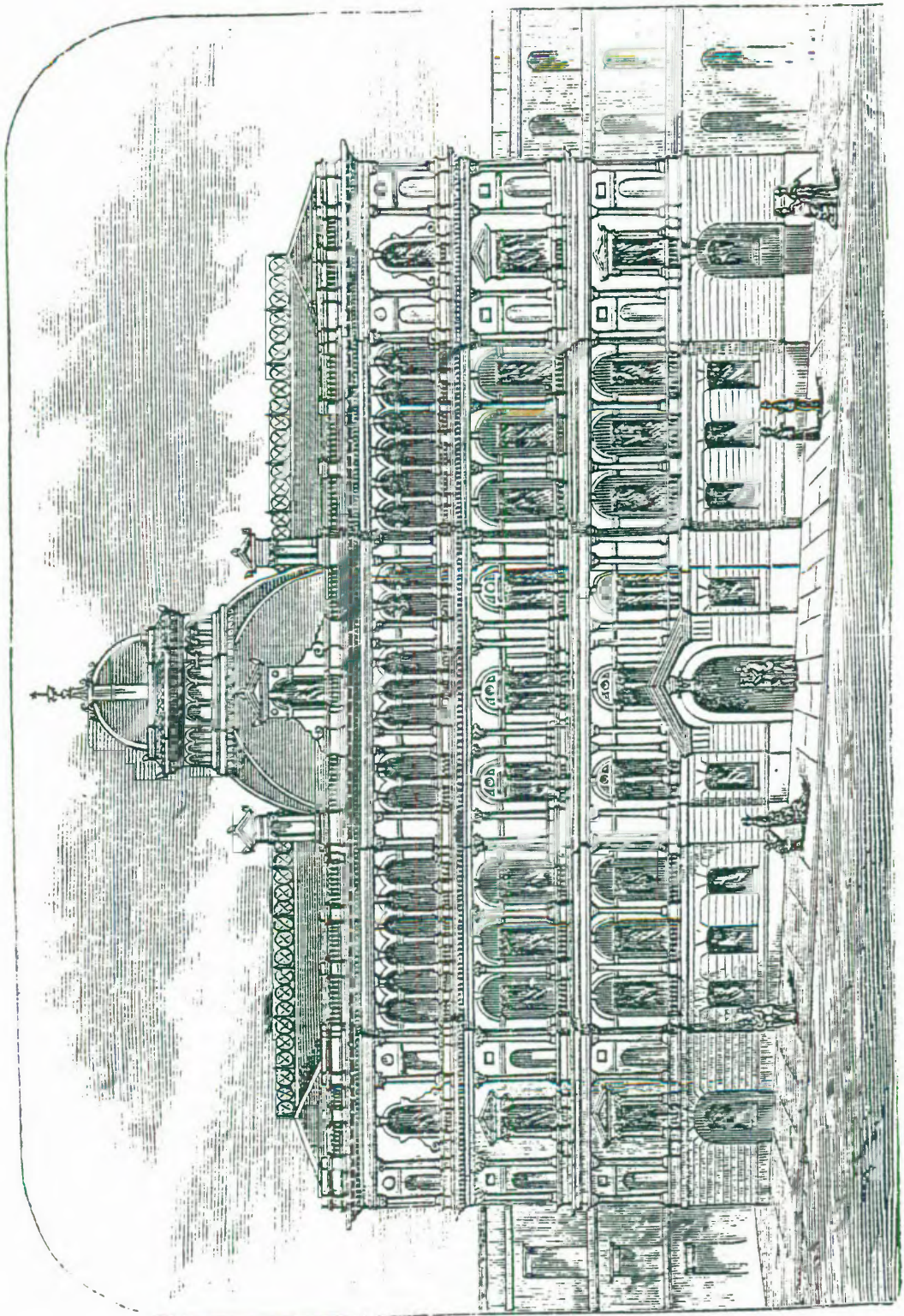
On 7 October 1876 Thomas Garrett, Secretary for Lands<sup>78</sup> laid the foundation stone of the first stage; that is, the Bridge Street frontage together together with parts of the adjoining wings. That brief ceremony was followed by a luncheon during which he outlined

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76. Barnet, *op. cit.*, p.513.

77. *ISN*, 19 August 1876.

78. Secretary for Lands in the Third Robertson Ministry (1875-77). In February 1877, overworked and drinking to excess, he resigned from the Ministry after having narrowly survived a censure motion. Within a month the Government fell. Later that year, when Robertson was returned to office, Garrett was again appointed as Secretary for Lands; he resigned two months later - G.A. Price, 'Garrett, Thomas', *ADB* 4.



the growth and significance of his Department and concluded his long address with a toast to Barnet and Young, which was 'received with considerable cheering' and to which they 'briefly responded'.<sup>79</sup>

Work on the second stage was to commence after the tender of D. Jones and Co. was accepted on 18 October 1887. After learning that it had been accepted, they reported that their estimate of cost was incorrect but, provided their tender for both the building and the finishing trades was accepted, they were prepared to stand by their original quote. Their offer was accepted and Barnet was directed to seek funds; his application, lodged with Treasury on 8 November, was not approved until 15 March 1888.<sup>80</sup>

Without that approval the work could not proceed. The delay was inexcusable; more particularly so when the Government was anxious that the construction commence immediately. Unemployment amongst Sydney masons was causing severe personal hardship at a time when the Government was able to provide work.<sup>81</sup> But the delay did not end when approval was finally received. Sutherland now decided, because of the time already lost, that fresh tenders should be invited. Barnet was criticised on account of those delays as well as for the unseemly haste with which the award of new tenders was now handled. Tenders had been invited on 24 March to close on 3 April; an arrangement condemned as being 'absurdly short'.<sup>82</sup> There was one matter on

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79. *SMH*, 9 October 1876.

80. Minute of Col. Arch., 9 April 1888 - PWD: Special Bundles - Lands Building (NSW AO 2/893). In the original tender the cost of the building was calculated as £71 951 and the finishing trades, £47 149. The revised costs were £98 790 and £20 315.

81. *ABCN*, 25 February 1888.

82. *Ibid.*, 24 March 1888.

which Barnet was blameworthy; he had failed to ensure that funds had been provided before tenders were invited with which must be coupled his negligence in not following up the application for funds which lay at the Treasury for five months.

In recommending that the tender submitted by Waite and Baldwin be accepted, Barnet made the point that it was considerably lower than that received from D. Jones and Co. which tender, he thought at the time, had been 'unreasonably low'.<sup>83</sup>

Within a short time, demolition of the old building was completed and construction commenced on the final stage of a building which, in the opinion of many people, would be 'a monument to the ability of this talented architect' and 'one of the finest of the many fine works of Mr. Barnet'.<sup>84</sup> On 5 January 1891 James N. Brunker, Secretary for Lands<sup>85</sup> lowered into position the cope stone of the huge clock tower before being entertained at a luncheon. In proposing the toast 'The Colonial Architect', John Macintosh,<sup>86</sup> M.L.C. 'waxed eulogistic of Mr James Barnet' quite forgetting that Barnet was no longer Colonial Architect and that his position had been abolished some six months earlier. Referring to important buildings 'scattered over the colony',

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83. Minute of Col. Arch., 9 April 1888 - PWD: Special Bundles - Lands Building, *loc. cit.* Waite and Baldwin's tender was estimated as £98 449.

84. *ABCN*, 12 May 1888. For a description of the building see *Ibid.*, 10 January 1891.

85. Secretary for Lands in the Fourth (1887-89) and Fifth (1889-1891) Parkes' Ministries. He was 'a dour, rather unimaginative businessman with little capacity for policy making but with a talent for administration' - W.G. McMinn, 'Brunker, James Nixon', *ADB* 3.

86. The founder of John Macintosh and Sons, wholesale and retail ironmongers, Sydney (1846) - Martha Ruthledge, 'Macintosh, John', *ADB* 5.

Macintosh reminded his audience that they 'were all the creation of Mr. James Barnet, and, taking into consideration the political influence which was always working against him, they were indeed creditable'.<sup>87</sup>

Macintosh's reference to 'political influence' was not explained. Certainly, as has been shown with the Carcoar Post Office, his plans were set aside for those of another person just as there seemed to be no doubt that the splendid Yass Court House had resulted from the influence of Michael Fitzpatrick. Moreover, there were times when buildings erected under his general supervision had been the means of attack upon Barnet. It was also true that he did not always enjoy the support of and suffered criticism from politicians who had used his Office to impress their electors through the provision of ornate public buildings. In addition, there had been increasing political pressure from the Institute of Architects for access to public works.

J. Horbury Hunt, President of the Institute of Architects warmly supported the toast and referred to his long personal and professional association with Barnet whose 'steadfastness of purpose' against 'political influence' had been outstanding.<sup>88</sup> Barnet was neither present to enjoy the praise which rightly belonged to him nor was he able to read Horbury Hunt's tribute which was ignored by the metropolitan press.<sup>89</sup> It was unlikely that Barnet's successor would have been embarrassed by Macintosh's remarks; Vernon had already left the luncheon 'in order to catch a train'.<sup>90</sup> In his annual

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87. *ABCN*, 10 January 1891.

88. *Ibid.*

89. See, for example, *SMH*, 6 January 1891 in which only Bruncker's speech was reported in detail.

90. *ABCN*, 10 January 1891.

report for 1893-94, Vernon noted that, for all practical purposes, the Lands Department building was now completed; in his opinion, it was 'one of the most important and handsome buildings in the Southern Hemisphere, and - a monument to the skill of [his] predecessor'.<sup>91</sup>

In preparing the design of the Lands Department building, Barnet had made provision for some forty-eight statues to decorate the exterior. He had intended that these should be portraits of notable colonial explorers or, if those portraits were not possible, a series of 'Allegorical subjects appropriate to Exploration might be chosen for statues in the upper tier'; these might include Geology, Botany, Perseverance, Agriculture or Mining, and pastoral pursuits.<sup>92</sup>

Philip Gidley King, a close personal friend of Parkes, supported the proposal but he did not agree entirely with the list of persons whom Barnet would honour. Nor did he agree that all the niches be immediately filled; he argued that there may be men of a later age 'who for eminent services in the great question of "the Land" may deserve places far more than some whose names are on [Barnet's] list'. Why, he asked should not permanent heads of the Department be also honoured and he 'would certainly recommend that the architect ... James Barnet, should not be overlooked nor the opportunity of paying him a fitting tribute on his retirement'.<sup>93</sup> At a suitable time, King raised the matter with Parkes who readily agreed; his approval was later cancelled and a statue of Sir John Robertson substituted.<sup>94</sup>

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91. Report of the Department of Public Works, 1893-94: Government Architect's Annual Report, p.54, NSW LA *V&P* 1894/95 (5).
  92. Barnet to Principal Under Secretary, 6 March 1890 - Barnet Papers (ML MSS 726, Item 1).
  93. Philip G. King to Barnet, 8 July 1890 - Barnet Papers, *loc. cit.*
  94. Principal Under Secretary to Signor Sani, 21 October 1891 with pencil note 'Cancelled by Sir George Dibbs who substituted Sir John Robertson - JB.' - Barnet Papers, *loc. cit.*



De Libra, who had been critical of the statues placed on and in the Colonial Secretary's Office, conceded that most of these statues 'fairly fulfilled their decorative purpose; while several ... [were] distinctly meritorious'.<sup>95</sup> David Souter, however, was repulsed by statues which he believed lacked artistic merit.<sup>96</sup> Unlike the Post Office carvings, there was no popular outburst either favouring or condemning them.

King had disagreed with Barnet's suggestion that some of the niches might be filled with allegorical figures which he thought would not be widely understood; persons who did understand them would 'criticize them to show off their superior knowledge or artistic attainments or affectation of the "dilettante"'.<sup>97</sup> That was an experience which Barnet had already suffered when emotional outbursts were substituted for objective evaluation and reasoned judgment. Later, Souter, for example, did not restrict his criticism to the statues; he condemned all of Barnet's buildings asserting that 'the designer had been influenced by one good original, from which he produced three unequally meritorious variants'. 'Weaker minds', he continued, 'are unconsciously obsessed with ideas which they perpetuate when opportunity occurs. We can trace the influence of the Colonial Architect in a score of buildings ... many of them regenerations of, a not too masterly style'.<sup>98</sup>

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95. J.G. de Libra, 'The Fine Arts in Australia', *Australasian Art Review*, 1 July 1899, p.18.

96. D.H. Souter, 'Architectural Sydney from a Non-Architectural Point of View', *Art and Architecture*, Vol.1, No.1, January 1904, pp.15-16.

97. King to Barnet, 8 July 1890 - Barnet Papers, *loc. cit.*

98. Souter, *op. cit.*, p.16.

Nevertheless, Souter was correct in his assertion that there were features common to a great number of Barnet's buildings. For example, loggios were a feature of both the Colonial Secretary's Office and the General Post Office. The keystone of the arch forming the entrance to the Custom House and the Fire Brigade headquarters featured a small, delicately-carved bust of Queen Victoria. Many of his buildings featured a clock tower which served to break and add interest to the general line of the facade. For example, the tower on the Newcastle Custom House, a particularly fine example of the style of architecture produced in Barnet's Office, was an ornament to the city and provided a time ball and weather vane.<sup>99</sup>

vi.

The Sydney Custom House also caused Barnet many problems and provided grounds for criticism of his work. An earlier building erected in 1844 was by 1874 overcrowded. During the next seven years demands for additional accommodation were unsuccessful; by 1881 the Minister responsible for the Custom Department, James Watson<sup>100</sup> could no longer procrastinate. He first unsuccessfully tried to lease a nearby building and on 25 July he selected a site for a new building which would be occupied by the Shipping Office and, as a result, relieve the pressure on the Custom House. Barnet was asked to prepare plans.<sup>101</sup>

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99. *T&CJ*, 4 November 1876.

100. Member of the Legislative Assembly (1869-1887). A loyal supporter of Parkes, he was appointed Colonial Treasurer in the Parkes - Robertson coalition (1878-1883) - Martha Rutledge, 'Watson, James', *ADB* 6.

101. *SMH*, 26 July 1881.

Watson's decision was overturned; the Government decided that the Custom House should be enlarged by the addition of another floor and two wings which would flank the existing centre block. Tenders were immediately invited but the work did not proceed smoothly. The building was occupied and until vacated nothing could be done to inspect the internal foundations.<sup>102</sup>

In evidence before the 1887 Public Works Department Board of Inquiry, Edward Rumsey, clerk of works, explained that £45 000 had been provided to rebuild two wings of the original building and to remove and replace the upper floor of the centre block. He stated that after the wings had been rebuilt and work had commenced on the centre block, a decision was taken that, because of its poor condition, the building should be demolished. Asked whether such a decision might have been made before the work was commenced, Rumsey replied that Barnet had not approved of the work; on the contrary, he had recommended that the whole building 'should be swept away'.<sup>103</sup> Rumsey's evidence was ignored. In an interim report, the Commissioners condemned the waste of money 'on this patchwork arrangement' and Barnet was criticised for his alleged failure to make a proper survey of the old building before agreeing that the work should go ahead.<sup>104</sup> In their final report, they launched a scathing attack upon Barnet who was accused of gross negligence and lack of professional foresight.<sup>105</sup>

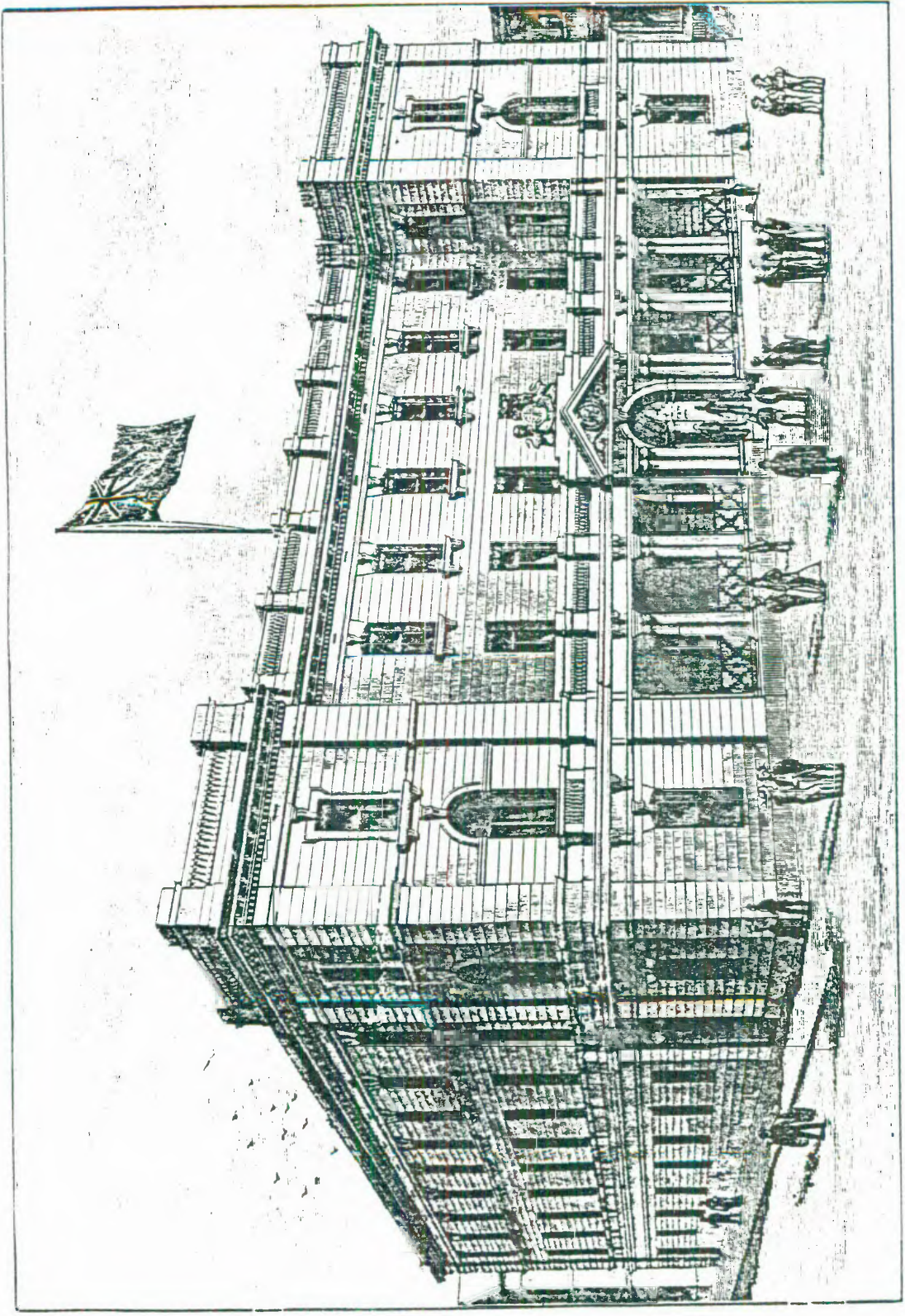
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102. PWD Board of Inquiry, Report - Colonial Architect's Department, Memo Respecting, p.22, NSW LA V&P 1887 (2).

103. PWD Board of Inquiry, Minutes of Evidence, pp.232-33, *passim*, NSW LA V&P 1887 (2).

104. PWD Board of Inquiry, Interim Report, 1 February 1887, p.16, *loc. cit.*

105. PWD Board of Inquiry, Final Report, p.26 - *loc. cit.*



THE NEW CUSTOM HOUSE, SYDNEY.

Invited to comment on the Board's report, Barnet again outlined the circumstances leading to the decision to demolish the old Custom House. Once more he emphasised that the question whether or not a new building should be erected 'was not for the Colonial Architect to decide ... but having been instructed to make these additions, here [*sic*] was no alternative but to have the work carried out'.<sup>106</sup> That reply suggested that Barnet had done no more than had been asked of him and it implied that he was not prepared to be held responsible for what had occurred. A prudent person would have surveyed the old building before the work was started but, as Barnet explained, this was not possible while the staff occupied it. That survey was not made before the work was commenced and whoever made that decision was culpable unless he had acted on the basis of advice provided by Barnet; advice which, in the light of Rumsey's statement, would not have been forthcoming.<sup>107</sup>

## vii.

Shortage of accommodation was a continuing problem in long-established departments with expanding activities; suitable leased accommodation was not always readily available in Sydney. When special facilities were required, the Government was forced to build; this need arose when arrangements were being made for the Fire

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106. PWD Inquiry, Remarks by the Colonial Architect on Final Report, p.45, *loc. cit.*

107. The records of the Colonial Architect's Office relevant to the Custom House provide no information which might clarify this matter.

Brigades Board to begin its operations. The Board was a statutory authority which enjoyed a measure of Parliamentary independence although it was under the control of the Colonial Secretary for funding.

The Fire Brigades Board was established under the *Fire Brigades Act 1884* (47 Vic. No.3) to set up and maintain in Sydney a brigade 'for the extinction and suppression of fires and for protecting life and property from loss and damage thereby'. In order to meet its responsibilities, the Board required a building especially designed to house its equipment. As a temporary measure, it had leased premises formerly occupied by the Insurance Companies Fire Brigade Board but it was anxious to move into its own premises and to establish a number of city fire stations.<sup>108</sup>

A suggestion from Critchett Walker, Principal Under Secretary that the Board's dilemma might be resolved, in the short term, if it were to occupy part of the old Lands Office was initially rejected by Barnet.<sup>109</sup> Later, acting on the suggestion of Alexander Stuart, he surveyed the building 'with a view to seeing whether [it] could be converted into the main station for the Fire Brigades'.<sup>110</sup> Such an arrangement was unlikely to have met with Barnet's approval; he intended to demolish the building and re-develop the site. The proposal, without the benefit of Barnet's opinion, was rejected by the Board as being 'not at all suitable'.<sup>111</sup>

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108. Secretary, Fire Brigades Board to Col. Sec., 10 May 1884 - Col. Sec.: Special Bundles - Erection of Fire Station (NSW AO 4/864.2).

109. Minute of Critchett Walker, 24 July 1884 - Col. Sec.: - Erection of Fire Station, *loc. cit.*

110. Minute initialled 'A.S.', 20 May 1884 - Col. Sec.: Erection of Fire Station, *loc. cit.*

111. Minute of 'JB', 3 June 1884 - Col. Sec.: Erection of Fire Station, *loc. cit.*

The Government then purchased land in Castlereagh Street as a site for the Headquarters Fire Station which the Board was anxious should be immediately built. William Coles, acting as Colonial Architect in the absence of Barnet on extended leave, arranged for sketch plans to be drafted; final plans and specifications would be prepared after the Board commented on those sketches and supplied a site plan. After receiving and examining that material, Coles found that variations sought by the Board would increase the cost by £2 000 and, so far as he was concerned, he believed that nothing further was required of him. Superintendent Bear of the Fire Brigades Board was furious and in a letter to the Colonial Secretary, Stuart, he emphasised that the proposed variations reflected the wishes of the Board; he had not suggested them. He reminded Stuart that he had sought 'a plain red brick building with internal comforts' and pointed out that, contrary to the Board's wishes, 'the stonework together with the ornamental work still [existed]'.<sup>112</sup> Stuart was also told that F.A. Wright, Secretary for Public Works<sup>113</sup> believed that the walls were 'too massive', ornamental work should be eliminated, the building constructed in brick, and the height of the tower reduced. Stuart agreed with those observations and directed that they be adopted. Only then did Coles modify the plans but he was not prepared to reduce the width of the walls. He argued that this might endanger the safety of the building; in any case, the reduced

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112. William Bear, Superintendent, Metropolitan Fire Brigade to Col. Sec., 7 July 1885 - Col. Sec.: Erection of Fire Station, *loc. cit.*

113. Secretary for Public Works (1883-1885) in the Stuart Ministry having previously served as Postmaster-General for four months - Martha Rutledge, 'Wright, Francis Augusts', *ADB* 6.

width of the walls would be in conflict with the requirements of the *Sydney Building Act* (8 Wm IV No.6).<sup>114</sup>

These matters having finally been settled, tenders were invited and that of White and Coghill, trading as the Paddington Steam Joinery Works was successful. On finding that their estimate was understated, they withdrew.<sup>115</sup> The plans and specifications were then modified in an attempt to reduce costs before tenders were again invited. Mitchell Brothers were the successful tenderers; under their contract the work was to be completed within twelve months.<sup>116</sup>

Bear had become increasingly concerned that the work was likely to be abandoned. He had been forced to lease expensive, but unsuitable, private accommodation and he was unable to organise the brigade effectively.<sup>117</sup> His concern was expressed in a memorandum written a few days after Mitchell Brothers' tender had been accepted; he may not have been aware that a contract had been awarded and the work of clearing the site was about to begin.

Mitchell Brothers went about their work in a leisurely manner. By June 1886, they had demolished an old building on the site and had commenced laying the foundations of the new. Barnett, now

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114. Bear to Col. Sec., 7 July 1885 with annotations 'AS 9/7/85' and 'W. Coles 24 July 1885' - Col. Sec.: Erection of Fire Station, *loc. cit.* Coles' reference to the *Sydney Building Act* was incorrect. It had been repealed in 1879 by the *City of Sydney Improvement Act* (42 Vic No. 25).

115. White and Coghill to W. Coles, 28 September 1885 - Col. Sec.: Erection of Fire Station, *loc. cit.*

116. Minute of Coles, 29 December 1885 - Col. Sec.: Erection of Fire Station, *loc. cit.*

117. Bear to Secretary for Public Works, 4 January 1886 - Col. Sec.: Erection of Fire Station, *loc. cit.*



returned from leave, was not satisfied with their progress; he arranged for the contract to be cancelled.<sup>118</sup> When tenders were again invited, John Baldwin was the successful tenderer.<sup>119</sup> His contract was completed within the time stipulated and the building was handed over in February 1888. Bear was proud of the finished work; he believed that the building was 'one of the most complete in the world for the space it occupies'.<sup>120</sup>

Although Barnet was credited with having prepared the plans and specifications for 'this convenient and well-planned building', much of that work had been undertaken during his absence from the Office. The plans had been worked up under the supervision of Rumsey, clerk of works in consultation with Bear who was 'continually' in the Colonial Architect's Office while that work was in hand.<sup>121</sup> Nevertheless Barnet or, in his absence, William Coles was ultimately responsible for the successful completion of the project. Delays which had occurred were not of the Office's making although the supervision of Mitchell's contract seems to have been lax.

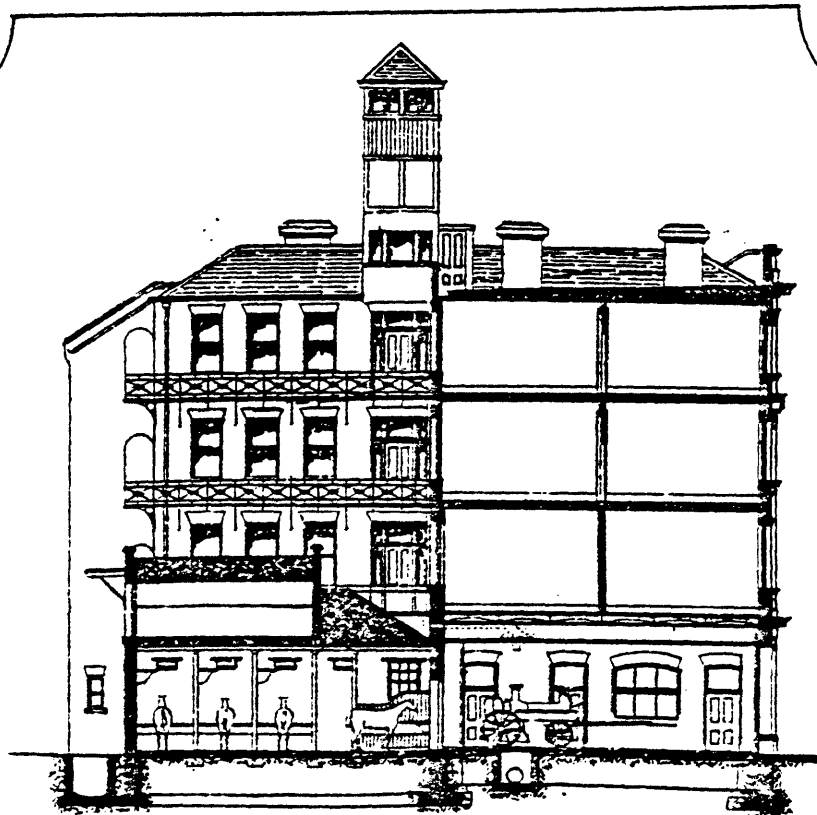
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118. Barnet to Under Secretary for Public Works, 29 June 1886 - Col. Sec.: Erection of Fire Station, *loc. cit.*

119. Under Secretary for Public Works to Col. Arch., 23 November 1886 - Col. Sec.: - Erection of Fire Station, *loc. cit.*

120. *T&CJ*, 10 March 1888.

121. PWD Board of Inquiry, Minutes of Evidence, p.234, q.5712 - NSW LA *V&P* 1887 (2).



TRANSVERSE SECTION.



FRONT ELEVATION.

*Metropolitan Fire Brigade Head Station,  
Sydney, N.S.W.*

JAS. BARNET, F.R.I.B.A.,  
Colonial Architect.

## viii.

The last of those city buildings to be considered in this chapter is the Central Police Court, Liverpool Street. This building has been incorrectly attributed to Walter Vernon.<sup>122</sup>

For many years the Central Police Court had occupied a building originally planned by Francis Greenway as a market house.<sup>123</sup> Over the years little had been done to improve the internal arrangements and by 1879 the building was in a dilapidated and run-down condition. For example, W. Crane, Police Magistrate occupied a room which was 'within fifteen feet of several closets and urinals, and about thirty feet from the markets, and from these sources a most disagreeable smell arises' which, he alleged, was affecting his health. Barnet was not sympathetic; he merely noted that 'This has always been'.<sup>124</sup> Crane next enlisted the support of Daniel O'Connor, member for West Sydney who argued in the Legislative Assembly that major renovations and repairs were long overdue; in the meantime, he believed that the court was being forced to work 'in an edifice not fit for a soup kitchen'.<sup>125</sup>

Barnet now inspected the building. In a brief report dated 20 February 1881 he explained that its unhealthy nature arose from its being near the vegetable market 'about which there [was] almost

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122. See, for example *ABCN*, 17 September 1892 and 26 August 1893.

123. J. Fowles, *Sydney in 1848*, Sydney, 1848, p.57.

124. W. Crane, P.M., to Under Secretary for Justice, 4 November 1880 - Col. Sec., Special Bundles: Site of Central Police Court, 1880-1884 (NSW AO 4/847.1).

125. NSW *PD* Session 1880-1881, Vol.4, First Series, p.20. O'Connor made the point that the Government had provided 'splendid structures in every little insignificant township'.

always an accumulation of decayed matter'; a problem which could only be overcome by the removal of the market. Nevertheless, he agreed that extensive renovations and repairs were necessary while arguing that additions should not be made if there were the remotest possibility of erecting a new building elsewhere.<sup>126</sup>

After the Minister for Justice, Sir George Long Innes<sup>127</sup> issued a statement that steps were being taken to improve the accommodation, Barnet was directed to examine possible sites for a new building. In August 1881 he was then asked to prepare plans and estimated costs of additions to the old building. Although those proposals were approved, the funds sought were deleted from the 1882 Estimates of Expenditure and provision made for the construction of a new building estimated to cost £25 000; a decision made 'without reference to the Colonial Architect'. Having learned of those arrangements, Barnet asked the Under Secretary for Public Works whether a site had been selected and he sought details of the required accommodation so that he might prepare plans and specifications; his request was ignored.<sup>128</sup>

The Government's indecision was widely criticised. Police Magistrate Dillon described the building as 'a wretched place, with an atmosphere like a cesspit'; a reporter from the *Daily Telegraph*

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126. Crane to Under Secretary for Justice, 3 December 1880 with minute Col. Arch. to Under Secretary for Public Works, 20 January 1881 - Col. Sec.; Site of Central Police Court, *loc. cit.*

127. By profession a barrister, he had been Solicitor-General (1872-1873) and Attorney-General (1873-1875) in the First Parkes Ministry (1872-1875). He was Minister for Justice (1880-1881) in the Parkes-Robertson Coalition. Throughout his political career, he supported Parkes whom he greatly admired - K.G. Allars, 'Innes, Sir Joseph George Long', *ADB* 4.

128. Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works - Central Police Court, Minutes of Evidence, pp.2-3, q.7. - NSW LA V&P 1888/89 (2).

pointed out that it was 'outwardly an eyesore, inwardly a stink house'.<sup>129</sup> The Government remained unmoved; only in the last week of September was Barnet directed to report upon a suitable site for the proposed building 'having regard to price and convenience, and as to the character of building and the probable cost'. Before that assignment was completed, he read in the press that a site had been purchased.

Barnet inspected the site which he condemned as being too small unless a tall building were erected. Furthermore, he noted that, because the block was on a corner, a double-fronted building would be required. He then inspected three other sites and reported favourably on one, lying between George and Pitt Streets, off Liverpool Street, because of its size and location. Although it fronted on to Union Lane it was readily accessible yet free of traffic noises.<sup>130</sup>

Barnet's recommendation was ignored; the Minister for Justice, William J. Foster<sup>131</sup> directed that he prepare plans and specifications for a building to be erected on the site which had been purchased. This was a task which gave Barnet little satisfaction. When forwarding 'a plan' for that building he repeated his earlier advice that the site was 'too limited for the purposes required' and that extensions, if necessary, would not be possible. He doubted that the accommodation

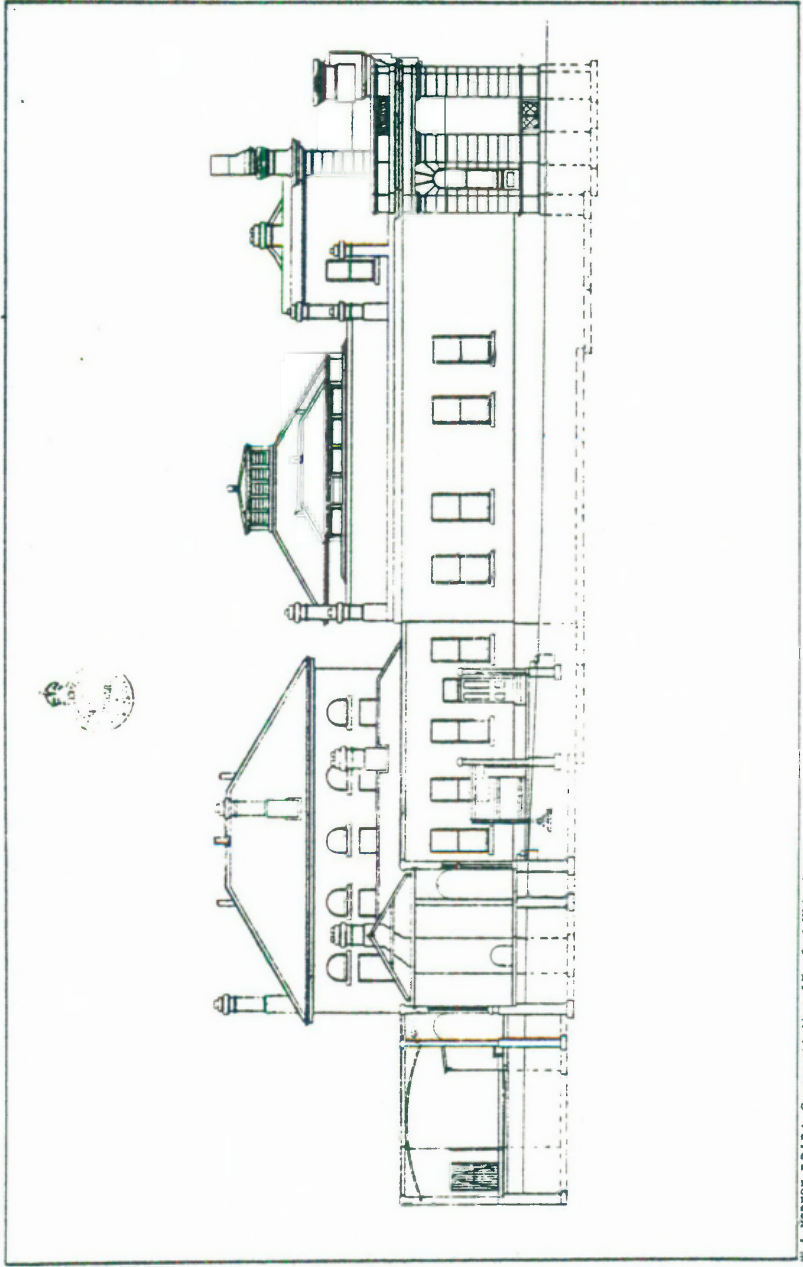
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129. *Daily Telegraph*, 11 May 1883.

130. Under Secretary for Justice to Col. Arch., 24 September 1883 with minute of Barnet, 20 October 1883 - Col. Sec.: Site of Central Police Court, *loc. cit.*

131. Foster had been appointed Minister for Justice on 14 October 1881 following the resignation of Long Innes. As Minister for Justice he had earned the title 'the modern Puritan prig' having implemented the recently-proclaimed *Licensing Act* - Martha Rutledge, 'Foster, William John', *ADB* 4.

THE AUSTRALASIAN BUILDER AND CONTRACTORS' NEWS, SEPTEMBER 17, 1892.



Mr. L. VERMOREL, F.R.S.B.A., Government Architect of New South Wales, Sydney.  
NEW CENTRAL POLICE COURT, SYDNEY.

sought could be provided for less than £36 000 and he thought that the new accommodation would not be 'much improvement upon that provided by the old building'.<sup>132</sup> This time his advice was accepted and the proposal was abandoned.<sup>133</sup>

In the meantime, nothing had been done to improve conditions at the Central Police Court where the building was falling about the ears of those who worked there.<sup>134</sup> It was only when the ceilings began to collapse that arrangements were made to transfer the court to the Immigration Barracks (formerly the Hyde Park Barracks) and on 3 October 1888 the court sat for the last time in the old building.<sup>135</sup>

Selection of a site now lay with the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works. Its report, tabled in Parliament on 23 October recommending that a building be erected on the site favoured by Barnet, was adopted.<sup>136</sup> That decision opened the way for the project to go ahead but it was not until November 1890 that the foundations had been completed and work commenced on the superstructure.<sup>137</sup>

This project was delayed because of the reluctance of Governments to provide funds for urgently needed court accommodation in Sydney. Buildings such as the Lands Department and the General Post Office

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132. Under Secretary for Justice to Under Secretary for Public Works, 17 October 1883 with minute from Barnet, 20 March 1884 - Col. Sec.: Site of Central Police Court, *loc. cit.*

133. See evidence of Rumsey, clerk of works before the 1887 PWD Board of Inquiry - PWD Board of Inquiry, Minutes of Evidence, p.236, qq.5798-5801 - NSW LA V&P 1887 (2).

134. *The Australian Star*, 29 August 1888.

135. *The Echo*, 3 October 1888.

136. Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works - Report: Central Police Court - NSW LA V&P 1888/89 (2).

137. C. Delohery, Deputy Stipendary Magistrate to Under Secretary for Justice, 29 November 1891 - PWD: Records (1891-1892), (NSW AO 2/893).

served both city and country. The number of members of the Legislative Assembly having either direct (pastoralists) or indirect (country storekeepers) interests in the country - although a dwindling number - was such as to be able to exert considerable influence in the House. In 1880, 26.0% of the members represented 'country interests'; that percentage had dropped to 22.6 in 1889 but it continued to have the potential for fostering 'country interests' at the expense of the city.<sup>138</sup> In addition, the long period of economic expansion had run its course so that public funds were no longer so readily available for public works.<sup>139</sup>

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138. A.W. Martin, 'The Legislative Assembly of N.S.W. 1856-1900', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol.2, No.1, November 1956, table 11, pp.54-55.

139. N.G. Butlin, *Investment in Australian Economic Development 1861-1900*, Canberra, 1978, pp.407-50.