

The next item in the Work Account is for binding, which has been estimated at the same rates as those charged by Mr. Burrett in his last contract.

The lithographic work was more difficult to estimate, very little of a similar character having been done for the Government by private firms. The rate was fixed on consultation with Mr. Earle, the lithographic foreman, who is a very superior and intelligent workman, and, it is to be presumed, unprejudiced. Where it was possible, Wellington prices for similar work were taken.

The photographer's work was estimated by reducing the surface of glass on which negatives were taken to square feet, the result being 377½ feet; and, including transfers for the lithographer, a value was made upon it of £4 per foot, which is considered by no means an excessive rate for the exquisitely beautiful work produced by this branch of the department.

The dies produced by the electrotyper are those used in printing newspaper postage stamps, and are 270 in number. They appear to be beautifully executed, and have been valued at 5s. each. Had they been ordered, it is believed they would have cost much more. They are equally efficient with the stamp plates procured from England, which cost about £100 each.

The remaining item is for stamp printing. The number of postage stamps printed during the eighteen months reached 9,844,320, and duty stamps 2,546,600. It was at one time proposed to print these stamps in London, and two estimates were obtained, namely, two offers for postage stamps at 1s. 6d. and 2s. 6d., and one for duty stamps at 6s. per 1,000. The first of these is considered a very low offer, and the other much too high. Taking the three into consideration, 2s. for postage stamps and 4s. for duty stamps seems to be a fair value to set upon the work. To all these prices is to be added the cost of the paper, which would be an extra charge, if the work were done by contract.

6. The Profit and Loss Account is debited with the current expenses of working the department, the depreciation on the stock, and interest on the money invested in permanent plant; credited with the balance of the Work Account; and closed by a transfer of the profit on the concern to the credit of the colony.

I take occasion to remark here, that, while scrutinising the scale of prices, I examined several items in the return of work, as shown in the printing reports, comparing them with the work-book. For instance, the number of Order Papers, nearly 76,000, printed during the Session, is sufficiently startling; but the work-book, which has been very carefully kept, shows it to be correct, the large number of Supplementary Order Papers and corrections having swelled the total to the above extent.

With regard to the working of the department, I have to submit the following statement of the result of my inquiries. During the investigation, I have had constant occasion to visit the printing office, and, so far as I could judge, there seemed to be every appearance of industry on the part of the employés.

The printer complains of the accommodation as barely sufficient for present requirements. The rooms are much crowded, and when the gas is lighted the air becomes very oppressive and unhealthy. The buildings have been patched from time to time, and the rooms are badly arranged for the purposes required. The machinery and hand-press rooms are separate, instead of forming one room, in which case one overseer could attend to the whole. The compositors have three separate rooms, instead of one large room. This interferes greatly with the supervision. The publishing-room or clerk's room, with two constant occupants, is so small that there is hardly room to turn in it, and is used to a great extent as a thoroughfare to the other rooms, and a short cut by strangers coming on business from other departments. The binding-room is much too small, and has a bad access to it. It is low-roofed and inconveniently crowded. There is no room available for surplus stores. Every foot of space, outside and inside, seems to be occupied—the whole block of buildings, Public Works, Government Store, and Printing Office, being crowded together; the engine-room and furnaces being dangerously situated in the centre of the block, with the additional grave objection of being entirely covered in by one of the composing rooms, which has been built above it, the occupants of which must be seriously inconvenienced by the heat from the furnace, and in a very awkward position in the event of an explosion. Of the latter, however, it is to be hoped there is little danger, as the boiler, though old, has lately had a thorough overhaul and several new plates put in, besides being worked at the low pressure of 20 lbs.

There can be no doubt, from the crowding and nature of the business carried on, that there is great danger of fire. Neither Printing Office nor Government Store are insured. There are two policies for £1,000 each on the Public Works Office; but it may be questioned whether, as that building is not now detached from the Printing Office, in the case of fire, the point might not be argued as to the validity of the insurance. Water is supplied to the premises from the Government tank, and there are two fire-plugs in close proximity to the buildings. There is no hose, but a number of fire buckets are kept ready in case of emergency. The principal reliance for safety is placed on the watchman, who comes on duty on week nights at 8 p.m., and on Sundays at 9 p.m. He remains on duty until 6 a.m.; and his orders are to make his rounds every half-hour. He has access to the engine-room and a few other rooms, with the discretionary power of bursting into any room where he may think there is danger. A watchman was lately dismissed for neglect of duty and bad conduct.

In the event of fire, the only alternative would be to get as much work done in town as possible; but the Government Printer states his conviction that the whole five private establishments in town combined could not, along with their own work, turn out more than from one-