

During the past year 58 subdivisional plans have been checked and passed through the office, embodying 1,703 separate allotments; the number of certificates of title prepared in duplicate being 1,734, and the plans drawn thereon 3,468.

Mr. Davis, the officer at present responsible for the proper check of the plans sent in by the licensed surveyors under the Act, has, in compliance with his instructions, submitted such plans to mathematical reduction. He reports that—

“The character of the work done for the Land Transfer Office by licensed surveyors has steadily improved since the institution of mathematical tests in January, 1876, and this improvement has been very evident during the past year. Some of the incompetent surveyors have ceased to practice, and others who still send in work find great difficulty in getting it passed. A continuance of the same system will soon weed out the few surveyors who still send in indifferent or negligent work, and so correct the grave error committed in former years of licensing men not properly qualified.”

That such a check was really a necessity cannot fairly be denied. Plans have been sent in by licensed surveyors which, if the titles had been issued upon the plans as submitted, would have probably involved the Government in serious losses.

A plot sent in by a licensed surveyor showed errors at the rate of 30 links per mile in the chainage of the street lines of an important borough. Other surveys have been forwarded from Timaru and elsewhere disclosing mistakes of from 11 to 37 links in the mile.

A grant from the Crown (of 170 acres) bearing, on the face of it, evidences of incorrectness, the ground in occupation was re-measured and found to contain 178 acres; eight acres more than granted.

A plan of a subdivision of an estate, into allotments not exceeding half-an-acre, although showing no serious discrepancies, was proved, by inspection on the ground, to have errors of from two to 30 links in the sides of separate allotments. A certificate of title under the Act conveys 30 links of a property belonging to an adjoining holder, which 30 links happens to include the best part of the latter's house, as well as the ground.

It is well known that some of the surveys of suburban properties, subdivided into allotments for auction purposes, are made by unqualified surveyor's assistants in the most careless manner. The land not being under the Act, no kind of supervision or check takes place, the solicitors preparing the conveyances from the sale plan. In time, portions of these estates are sought to be brought under the Act, and, knowing the kind of surveys which have been made, we are obliged—before complying with applicant's request—to demand re-surveys; this course, although a necessity, often deterring owners from proceeding further.

In cases where, under similar conditions, re-surveys were formerly not insisted on, or rather were not demanded, we find that the certificates of title will not agree with the land as occupied; as, in the example I have last quoted, the certificate of title, when the measurements were reproduced on the ground, gave the holder 30 links of his neighbour's land, on which was the greater portion of his house. This is, perhaps, the worst instance that has come under my notice, but the correction of less serious overlaps may prove very costly to the Government, especially in this district, where land is becoming so valuable.

Another source of fruitful errors in the boundaries of Land Transfer Surveys is the slight and totally insufficient way in which the subdivisional surveys are pegged on the ground. Often the pegs are 3 in. by 1 in. battens, driven only a few inches; these soon get knocked out, and are frequently put in again at random; the buyer of the subdivisional allotments fencing his land by them is afterwards much disappointed to find that his fences and his title do not agree.

In such circumstances I can but repeat my recommendation, that more stringent rules respecting surveys under the Act, and a rigid examination of the qualifications of surveyors, or assistants working under it, should be adopted, and also that licensed surveyors certifying to surveys which may be afterwards proved incorrect shall be removed from the list.

Although, in rejecting surveys and insisting upon absolute proof of capability before forwarding surveyor's certificates for your approval, I have been accused of private motives and personal animosity. I trust that the somewhat delicate position in which the discharge of this duty necessarily places me, and the apparent impossibility of carrying out any needed reform without incurring such imputations, will be properly estimated, and that the result will show that I am actuated purely by a desire to improve the quality of the work, and, as a sequence, to prevent the serious losses in which the Government will inevitably be involved by guaranteeing titles under the Land Transfer Act, without an insistance of the correctness of the surveys, upon which such titles are based.

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