

A recent visitor to New Zealand, an architect by profession, has kindly explained to the British public in the professional journals that the architecture and all surroundings of public buildings in this colony are contemptible and tawdry; but, so long as the public and the public services can be conveniently accommodated and administered within them, the country can perhaps afford to do without those meretricious external attractions upon which so much money is expended at Home, with not unusual detriment to the convenience and utility of the internal arrangements.

LIST OF BUILDINGS.

One of your first instructions upon taking control of public buildings in the Defence Department was that a complete list of all the public buildings of the colony should be prepared.

A preliminary numerical classification has been prepared, and will be found attached.

WORK OF THE YEAR.

The funds of the Public Buildings Department are partly voted out of the Loan Fund and partly out of the Consolidated Fund; it is natural, therefore, to observe a division between the works executed out of each. The following are some of the principal items in connection with the past year's expenditure:—

Out of Loan Fund.

Departmental Offices.—New Block in Auckland.—The large new block of Departmental Buildings in Auckland has been completed and occupied. The Customs, Survey, and Native Land Court Departments absorb most of the accommodation, but there are also offices for Ministers when in Auckland, Registrar of Births, Deaths, and Marriages, Audit Inspector, Sheep Inspector, and others. The rooms are lofty, airy, and well lighted, the arrangements of corridors and passages convenient, and the whole of the interior is neatly but not expensively finished. This contract has been carried out under a firm of private architects, Messrs. E. Mahony and Son, instructed by the Government, and has been well and faithfully executed. It holds its own for general appearance amongst the many other fine buildings in brick and stone which distinguish this quarter of the city. The furniture and fittings demanded and supplied in large quantities are plain and serviceable, and considerably reduced from original ambitious ideas. A very large proportion of them has been constructed comparatively inexpensively by day-labour out of the existing fittings in the offices which departments have vacated for their new lodgment. Those which required to be entirely new have been supplied under contract. Linoleum to cover the whole of the floor-space throughout has been imported from England, local firms having declined to avail themselves of the opportunity afforded them of tendering for this supply. Quarters have been provided for a caretaker in the basement, a night-watchman has been appointed, and several fire-prevention appliances instituted. The sanitary arrangements have been specially revised and improved, (the architects agreeing and supervising alterations without commission), these having been insufficiently regarded in the original specification. The fire-prevention system should be further extended, and is planned.

The cost of the structure to 31st March has been £15,366, and of the furniture, fittings, and general accessories of occupation, £172, while the outstanding liabilities are £1,474. There will be some small further expenditure before everything is quite complete, and the probable total cost may be set down at £17,000 in round numbers, being the amount authorised.

In connection with the occupation of this block, it may be mentioned that, in accordance with the Special Powers and Contracts Act of 1885, the Auckland branch of the University of New Zealand takes over the old survey buildings on Constitution Hill, and the professors vacate Admiralty House, in which they have hitherto had free quarters, and which now reverts to the Government. This movement of the University also absorbs the cottage of the caretaker of the Supreme Court buildings, for whom quarters have been fitted up in the offices in that block vacated by the Native Land Court Department. Various other minor changes in the disposition of public offices in Auckland have also followed upon the occupation of these new buildings.

Stamp-printing Office, Wellington.—The printing of the postage and other stamps for the colony has hitherto been conducted in a portion of the Departmental Buildings much cramped for space, without proper isolation, and insufficiently protected by the nightly patrol of the watchman staff; and the Government has decided that this important department shall be transferred to the control of the Government Printer. A considerable amount of time and ingenuity was expended in endeavouring to arrange accommodation for the printing of stamps in the present Government Printing Office, but it could not be satisfactorily managed. A contract has been let for a new brick office adjacent to the Printing Office, designed with special regard to the requirements of stamp-printing, amongst which are isolation, security, a single room, and solid foundations for machinery.

Departmental Buildings, Dunedin.—Extensive and important rearrangements have been made in this large block as regards the judicial portion. The Supreme Court chamber has been reduced in length, the space cut off converted into Registrar and Deputy-Registrar's offices, and the original Registrar's rooms into a convenient Police Court; these operations summarily settling the difficulty as to providing a better Police Court in Dunedin. The Supreme, Resident Magistrate's, and Police Courts are now all under one roof, and adjacent to each other; and this disposition has enabled a useful arrangement to be made of all the offices of these various Courts, giving improved facilities for their working. The sanitary appliances throughout, which were very defective, have been completely revised and modernised; and it is believed the whole rearrangement, which was difficult and complicated to plan out, has been the best that could be done with the building, and is satisfactory to those immediately concerned.