

Advertiser, Feb. 28/13

# THE PUBLIC LIBRARY BOARD'S BUILDINGS.

## LOOKING FORWARD.

### ADDITIONAL SPACE ASKED FOR.

A deputation from the board of governors of the Public Library, Museum, and Art Gallery waited on Thursday upon the Acting Minister of Education (Hon. J. G. Bice) to urge consideration of their claim to additional land for extension purposes at the rear of the present buildings on North-terrace. The deputation, which consisted of the president of the board (Mr. W. J. Sowden), Mr. Walter Howchin and Mr. R. Woolnough (members of the board), and Mr. J. R. G. Adams (general secretary), was introduced by Mr. W. D. Ponder, M.P.

Mr. Sowden said the members of the deputation came directly to headquarters, because they felt it better to avoid any possibility of misunderstanding in the future. It had been assumed that, because the Public Library Board had made no claim, it was satisfied with the area at present at its disposal. The members felt, in the circumstances, that it was only right they should point out the exact position of affairs, and so absolve themselves from any blame in the future. In the course of years the need for additional land would be urgent. As a matter of fact, judging by their own experience, and not by mere theory, the requirements of the next 10 or 15 years would be pressing. Sufficient support for that statement would be found in an official statement which had been compiled by the general secretary, a copy of which had been handed to the Acting Minister. Although the new building on the eastern wing had not yet been handed over, they had more specimens in readiness than would completely fill every nook and corner of it, and still a relatively large number would have to remain undisplayed. It would be necessary, too, to extend the Art Gallery before long. The popularity of the Public Library Board's institutions was constantly growing, and, so far as their finances would allow, they were constantly adding new attractions of an educational nature. As far as the University's claim was concerned, he wished to point out that the Chancellor of the University, in pleading for a grant of land for the extension of that institution, said that part of the ground available would be necessary for extensions of the Public Library Board's institutions. There was no question of clashing between the claims of the University and the Library Board. If the Acting Minister thought of visiting the ground to inspect it his attention might be drawn to a quaint old chapel there. He wished to express the hope that, as there were so few relics of that kind in the State, and scarcely any with such architectural features, the building would be left under the control of the Library Board. He had a scheme whereby they could use the interesting old building for the display of some curiosities. The completion of the Public Library block by the erection of the main front was contemplated, but by the time that work was finished there would be enough exhibits to fill the entire structure. The value of the exhibits in the hands of the board was very great. Roughly speaking, they controlled between a quarter of a million and three hundred thousand pounds worth of property of all kinds. The only alternative to the extension of the present block of buildings would be the erection of a building at some distance from the present site, and the administration of separate institutions would be a costly matter. Looking at the matter as business men, they felt that they must make extensions, and there was no other place where those extensions could be so well made as at the rear of the present buildings. They submitted, therefore, that they had more than a sentimental claim to consideration.

Mr. Howchin pointed out that he had a three-fold interest in the matter—as a representative of the Royal Society, as chairman of the Museum committee, and as a member of the teaching staff of the University. In each capacity he felt that extension was urgently needed; but he thought that the claimants might come to an amicable understanding as to the amount of space to be allotted to them. Additional accommodation might be afforded to all them, without detriment to any one of them.

Mr. Woolnough urged the advisableness of the extension of the Library Board's institution on the present site on economic grounds. He pointed out that sufficient space was available to meet the requirements of the board for the next hundred years.

The Acting Minister, in reply, said the information supplied by the deputation would be of material assistance to the Government in deciding what must necessarily be a very difficult problem. The University, Public Library, and the School of Mines would all have to be considered in the allocation of any land available. It appeared that there would be a considerable area of land viable at the rear of the Library Board's present extensive buildings when the barracks and Destitute Asylum were moved to new quarters. It would be available, too, without interfering with the claim put forward by the University. The fact that all the land at the disposal of the board would shortly be utilised, materially strengthened their claim for consideration. He would be pleased to place the matter before his colleagues, and he was sure the Government would mete out even-handed justice.

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## EDUCATION BLOCK.

### Public Library Board Requirements.

#### Deputation to Government.

Members of the board of governors of the Public Library, Museum, and Art Gallery waited upon the Acting Minister of Education (Hon. J. G. Bice) on Thursday to discuss the suggested appropriation of the land now occupied by the Destitute Asylum, the Military Department, and the police barracks. The deputation was introduced by Mr. Ponder, M.P., and there were also present the President of the Board (Mr. W. J. Sowden), Mr. W. Howchin, Mr. R. Woolnough, the Secretary (Mr. J. R. G. Adams), and the Secretary to the Minister (Mr. L. W. Stanton).

#### —More Space an Urgent Necessity.—

Mr. Sowden explained that the deputation had approached the Minister with the object of avoiding possible misunderstandings in the future, and had therefore taken time by the forelock. He had noticed in the press that it had been suggested that the Education Commission should make an allocation of the lands which should be set free by the removal of the destitute, military, and police buildings, and a member of that commission had informed him that the Government had asked it to make an allocation—he presumed by way of suggestion. He understood that as the Public Library Board had not made a claim to the Government in the matter it was assumed that it was satisfied with the land at its disposal. The position which the board emphatically took was that it assumed that no allocation of land would be made by the Government without reference to it, on account of the closeness of its interest in the matter. Apart from that aspect, however, the board felt that it was only right to go to headquarters at once and point out its exact position. In the next 10 or 15 years the requirements of the board in the matter of land would be pressing. He suggested to the Government whether it would be wise, as a matter of policy, to limit the Public Library, Museum, and Art Gallery Board to its present area of land. Although the substantial new wing of the Museum had not yet been handed over to the board, there were already more specimens than would completely fill every nook and corner of that building. With regard to the Art Gallery, if the pictures of the immediate future were to be properly displayed an extension of that structure would be necessary. The board was regularly supplying new attractions for the public. It had always regarded itself as dealing in the finished products of art and natural history.

#### —No Friction with University.—

The present Chancellor of the University, who had been President of the Public Library Board for 17 years, had remarked recently at a deputation that the ground being applied for would be required for the Public Library Board on account of its growing needs, as well as for the University. There was therefore no sort of friction between the claims of the Public Library and those of the University. Shortly, the board took it for granted that the Government would in due time complete the building scheme upon its present area by the erection of a front facade between the existing library and the new wing of the Museum, but that would not meet the board's prospective requirements. Roughly, the board had at

present under its control between £250,000 and £300,000 worth of property of all kinds. The only alternative to the acquisition of the extra land for which they were asking would be to have buildings erected at some distance from the present site. Obviously that would be a disastrous and costly experiment, and, in addition, it would interfere with what he understood had been the object of various Governments—to preserve for Education Block an individuality of its own unknown in any other city. The erection of new buildings some distance away would also mean doubling the staff in places, and the board felt that the extra cost of undertaking that alternative would more than represent the expenditure upon a reasonable extension of the present buildings. It was interesting to note that the area of land at present controlled by the board amounted to about three and three-quarter acres, compared with four and three-quarter acres in charge of the similar body in Melbourne, and about three acres in Perth. Looking at the whole matter from a business point of view, the board must make extensions, and he submitted with due respect to the Government that it had more than sentimental claims for consideration.

#### —Friendly Intercourse Suggested.—

Mr. W. Howchin said his position was somewhat anomalous, inasmuch as he was interested in three distinct institutions which were seeking extra space. He represented the Royal Society upon the board of governors of the Public Library, he was Chairman of the Museum committee, and he was also one of the teaching staff at the University. He sympathized heartily with the remarks of the President, and knew that in the case of the Royal Society more room was urgently required. The Museum was always in a chronic state of want of space, and although there was a handsome addition to the old building, the new structure would be quite unequal to the needs of the Museum in the near future and even at present. The claims of the University had already been placed before the Government, and perhaps they were of paramount importance; but the respective requests were all of a friendly nature, and a little friendly intercourse would result in a mutual understanding regarding the allotment of space to the different institutions concerned.

#### —The Economic Aspect.—

Mr. R. Woolnough submitted the economic side of the question. He said it must appear that that it would be advantageous to keep all the educational buildings as close together as was possible. It was time that the Public Library Board was assured that in the near future its requirements would be met with additional ground space. To distribute the three branches of education under the control of the board would considerably increase the annual outlay. The present was the time when the Government had an opportunity to give to the board sufficient space to cover its requirements for many years to come.

#### —The Government Sympathetic.—

The Minister, in reply, said he was pleased at the visit of the members of the board, for it would be of material assistance to the Government in deciding what would necessarily be a difficult problem. He was glad that there was no clashing between the University and the Public Library Board, and he hoped that there would not be any in the case of the School of Mines, which also had claims to be considered. The Minister of Education was more conversant with existing conditions than he was, but Cabinet had given no consideration yet to details of the scheme under discussion. A considerable area of land would be available when the Destitute Asylum and the police barracks had been removed, and the claims of the board should be able to receive consideration without interference with the needs of the University. The Premier had asked that the Acting Premier and he should keep in touch with the requirements of the respective educational institutions concerned, and that was so far as any determination of the Government had gone. The information placed before him regarding the wonderful development of the respective institutions would strengthen the case of the deputation, and he would have the utmost pleasure in placing it before his colleagues when they were considering the matter. He could give an assurance that the Government would endeavour to mete out even-handed justice to the members of all those public bodies who were sacrificing their time and energies in building up the magnificent heritage to the State represented by Education Block. He hoped that the Government would be able to help them in the valuable work they were doing in behalf of education in the State.