DRAFT REPORT

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

LAND TITLES OFFICE OF NSW

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WENDY THORP
INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this analysis is to provide an historical context that explains how the buildings that comprise the Land Titles Office of NSW came to be on the site, for what purpose and how they fit into the general development of their environment and departmental history. This context is derived from historical or archival sources that include maps, plans, photographs, parliamentary enquiries and records of the Department of Public Works. A full bibliography of these works is presented at the end of this report. Of particular importance, reference should be made to the recently published history of the office ("From Parchments to Passwords A History of the Land Titles Office of New South Wales", Crundwell, Golder and Wood., 1995) which has provided an invaluable departmental and administrative context for this analysis which is primarily concerned with the evolution of the buildings that now house the Land Titles Office.

The Land Titles Office has had a long and important place in the the development of both the colonial and later state bureaucracy as well as being of fundamental importance to the development of the state. Commencing in 1788 various systems and reforms have been implemented to try and document the increasingly complicated system of grant and purchase. Often numerous transactions were made with little or no record which created an administrative and legal nightmare later in the nineteenth century and lasting, in many cases, well into the twentieth century.

In addition to the burdensome task of recording land alienation and ownership the office of the Registrar General, essentially through default, became the repository for records relating to Births, Deaths and Marriages as well as a plethora of transactions relating to greatly diverse interests that included Acts of Parliament, companies and trade marks. In some instances these duties were not to be divested until the later years of the twentieth century.

With the escalation of duties and the large amount of records relating to those responsibilities, almost immediately, complaints were made of the ad hoc arrangements made for housing both the staff and records of the department. A purpose-designed building was opened in 1860 but within a relatively short period of time this also was found to be inadequate to the task. Despite renting additional rooms the situation was at a critical point by the 1890s. The current building and its extensions were the answer to that and subsequent problems of accommodation.

The following sections establish the principal periods of development of this specific site set in the context of departmental history and the place of the building in its immediate environment. The sections are described as follows:

Setting the Context: The Evolution of the Department

1788 - 1825: A "Muddled Pre-History"
1825 - 1843: Imposing A System

1843 - 1850: The First Office of the Registrar General

1850 - 1856: The Registry of Deeds Office

1856 - 1862: The Second Office of the Registrar General

1862 - 1890: Falling into Disgrace

1890 - 1900: Reforms

**New Beginnings**

1900 - 1917: Reforming the Department - Creating a New Office

1917 - 1939: Big Plans

1939 - 1945: Blackout

1945 - 1967: Extensions and Renovations

1967 - 1996: Modernisation
2.0 SETTING THE CONTEXT: THE EVOLUTION OF A DEPARTMENT

The evolution of the Land Titles Office spans the full period of European settlement in Australia. It is a complex history that encompasses several major changes in structure, numerous Acts of Parliament and significant changes in operation. An overview of the departmental history is vital in appreciating the role of the building at Chancery Square. Its construction was in direct response to the growth and pressures experienced by that department during the later years of the nineteenth century which, in themselves, had been outcomes of the changing system of land titles during the earlier part of that century. Understanding the role of the Land Titles Office in the development and administration of the state is also crucial to determining the significance of the building. The latter, as well as the earlier structure used for this purpose in Elizabeth Street, embody and represent the Land Titles Office, a department which had an immense impact on the state and its citizens. In this section the context of that nineteenth century development is presented in several key periods (1).

2.1 1788 - 1825: A "Muddled Pre-History"

After claiming the entire eastern portion of the new colony in the name of the British Crown Governor Phillip was empowered to make grants of this huge tract to ex-convicts, ex-members of the marines and free migrants. From the beginning, however, he was hampered in this process through lack of a dedicated position and bureaucracy; even the official seal did not arrive until 1791. Responsibility for recording and making returns of grants was first given to David Collins who also filled the positions of Judge Advocate and the Governor's Secretary. The long term association of the Land Titles Office with the Department of the Attorney General and Justice derives from this position.

At first a manageable exercise, because of the relatively low number of grants, the process was almost immediately complicated by the often unrecorded sale of land between private parties and grants made to members of the NSW Corps prior to their retirement. An orderly system of selection, survey, grant and registration was sabotaged by these events. By the beginning of the nineteenth century large tracts of land had been granted and changed hands several times often with little or no record of ownership and sale. The court was overloaded with land disputes.

The first formal registration of titles, four books kept at each of the principal settlements, was established in 1800. In 1802 the system was amplified with responsibility for recording and centralising made to the separate positions of Judge Advocate and Governor's Secretary. An Old Register was established but, as registration was not compulsory, the system was only marginally improved by this step. The first important reform was made by Governor Macquarie in 1817 when a system of memorials was introduced; land transactions not encompassed by this system were considered to be fraudulent and void. The system was not foolproof but it did make a considerable improvement on the earlier arrangements.
The rapid expansion of the colony sabotaged much of the good of this reform; many thousands of acres were actually settled prior to formal grant and registration and passed hands several times before that grant, then no longer valid according to the occupier of the ground, came into being.

2.2 1825 - 1843: Imposing A System

In 1824 the Old Register was closed subsequent to a reorganisation of the colonial bureaucracy. Following a short hiatus a Deeds Registration Act was passed in 1825 which made the Supreme Court responsible for all transactions relating to land and its registration. It was a significant improvement on Macquarie's reforms in no small part due to the principal that the registered deed superseded all previous documentation. The first Registrar was appointed under this new system. However, almost immediately, the arrangement became more complicated by the newly added responsibility to record all laws passed in the colony as well as baptisms, marriages and burials. These additional duties to that of recording land transactions were to remain the reponsibility of this department until well into the later years of the twentieth century.

Ever more paperwork and duties were required of the office when, from 1831, changes were made to the methods of disposing of Crown Land. An elaborate system evolved which entailed transactions passing through the offices of the Colonial Secretary, Surveyor General and Treasury as well as the Supreme Court Registry. Coinciding with a land boom during the 1830s the system was in danger of collapse as transactions and demands for copies of existing grants outstripped the capabilities of these offices.

By the early 1840s the Registrar admitted that his staff could not keep up with the demands placed upon them; indexing of records, for example, had ceased due to lack of time. The failings of the system were exacerbated by the space made available for the Registry. Two small rooms in the Supreme Court building (on Elizabeth Street) were incapable of holding staff, records and members of the public and they were vulnerable to fire, damp, theft and other accidents. A new Deeds Registration Act of 1842 further increased the documentation to be housed and managed by the Registry and although the same Act created a separate registry at Port Phillip. A better solution to the ever increasing problem was required, in fact, a separate office from the Supreme Court.

2.3 1843 - 1850 The First Office of the Registrar General

The Deeds Registration Act of 1843 modernised the system of deeds registration making of it a full record of all transactions although the process remained a voluntary one. In addition, the Act legislated for the creation of an Office of the Registrar General for New South Wales excluding Port Phillip. The first officer to fill that position was appointed in 1844. As well, money was voted to establish a
separate deeds registry. The new Registry, staffed by the Registrar General two clerks and a messenger, was established in rooms in Macquarie Street which had been previously used by the Surveyor General. These premises leaked, smoked and were insecure.

The building was not the only insecure aspect of the department. At first refused any funds by the Parliament the situation deteriorated during the later part of the 1840s. Despite carrying out some much needed reforms, including creating the easily accessible Vendors' Index and sorting and sending over thirteen thousand records to Port Phillip, the powers and responsibilities of the office were transferred back to the Supreme Court in 1850.

2.4 1850 - 1856: The Registry of Deeds Office

The Court was not pleased with the removal of the registry back to its orbit. Taxed with their own large case load the new Registry of Deeds Office, which had moved back to the Court building, became the responsibility of the Chief Clerk of the Court. With the commencement of the gold rushes during the 1850s the Office was taxed to the limits. Not only responsible for registering numerous transactions directly related to the land associated with gold claims, as well as urban development which boomed because of the influx of migrants, the Registry also had to maintain its traditional role of recording births, deaths and marriages as well as details of numerous company partnerships and the Acts of Parliament passed in these years. More staff had to be taken on to cope with the clerical work but there was a constant struggle to retain their positions with opposition from cost cutting elements of the Colonial Secretary's department.

By the mid 1850s land reform and the processes of administering land in the colony had become an important political issue. Positive steps forward came from the unlikely direction of the marriage arrangements of the colony. Complex and tangled until that time Parliament approved an Act which required that all marriages be registered with the "Registrar General of Marriages". This Marriage Act was followed by a Registration Act which created a general and secular centralised registry for all births, deaths and marriages. The new Registrar General was appointed in 1856. By this time the records and staff of the department were scattered around the city.

2.5 1856 - 1862: The Second Office of the Registrar General

Although when first opened not responsible for registering deeds quite quickly the new office became responsible for land transactions. In 1857 the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages was established in offices in Castlereagh Street, a series of five buildings known as Blacks Buildings for which a rental was paid of approximately 800 pounds per annum (1). In the following year the department also acquired a statistical branch; from this was issued the Statistical Register of
NSW which replaced the earlier Blue Books of the Colony. The responsibilities of
the department and the ongoing problems of the several rooms it now occupied
were finally solved in 1860 when a purpose designed office, by the Colonial
Architect Alexander Dawson, was opened in Elizabeth Street. It had taken a
Select Committee recommendation for the work to have taken place. For the first
time the building had a fire proof storage area for records. This building housed
the Deeds Branch (2). The Births, Deaths and Marriages branch remained in
Castlereagh Street.

The later part of the 1850s was given over to simplifying land transactions. The
Titles to Land Act passed in 1858 was designed to cure some long standing
irregularities in questions of land tenure and title and streamline subdivision of
land. This was an issue of some importance in a period of rising land values and
demand for, particularly, urban blocks. The matter of conveyancing was a
particularly pressing concern. The system as it then stood was difficult to search
and open to uncertainty with respect to the final result.

From 1856 onwards various committees discussed several reform options. The
Registrar General favoured the system pioneered in South Australia by Torrens.
By 1862 NSW was the only state that had not adopted the system. It did so at the
beginning of 1863 after the passing of the 1862 Real Property Act. Under this
system registration created title to the property. When the property was sold the
title was cancelled and the new owner acquired a new certificate of title. Those
who had acquired land prior to the Torrens system applied to bring their property
under that system by making a primary application and presenting all the existing
documentation; at this time all conflicting interests and uncertainties about the
property were resolved prior to it being issued with a new certificate.

2.6 1862 - 1890: Falling Into Disgrace

The new system required an expansion of staff, particularly a drafting branch, as
the submission of plans with a primary application became a standard practice.
Reference maps became a significant part of the new Land Titles Office as
applications and certificates were charted and the charts provided an index to the
registration system. The office also assumed new responsibilities including
becoming the Registry of Trade Marks in 1865 and in the following year the
repository for the Registration of Brands, that is, the distinctive marks applied to
cattle to identify specific herds and owners. This increasingly large and onerous
task was not passed to the Chief Inspector of Stock until 1874. To ease the almost
crippling shortage of space in the offices additions were made to it between 1875
and 1886 by the Colonial Architect James Barnet.

By the 1870s there was considerable and growing dissatisfaction with the
department which was in part due to its inability to keep up with the demands
placed upon it by the new Torrens system. A Royal Commission was initiated in
1879 to look into the problem. The investigation found that the department
operated in an aura of "unpleasantness" and inefficiency; corruption was hinted at
in the final report. Recommendations were made to restructure the branch.
although some of the more important reforms were not initiated and the department continued to operate under a cloud. In 1886 a Government Statisticians department was appointed after criticism of this function of the office.

Despite the changes and the criticism by the later 1880s the office was responsible for a vast amount of transactions as Sydney again entered another land boom. At its core was the Land Titles Office which registered and administered dealings with property. The Registrar General’s section was responsible for all other transactions that did not relate to land including births, deaths, marriages, trade marks, Acts and company articles. A series of scandals opened the department to an investigation which revealed discrepancies and laxities in several areas, particularly accounting, as well as a greatly demoralised staff. Criticism of the slowness of the Torrens system mounted and many developers chose to use the Old System for this reason. Allegations again surfaced of corruption. After a series of public court cases, at which time the workings of the department were severely criticised, the Registrar General was asked for his resignation by Sir Henry Parkes in 1890.

2.7 1890 - 1900: Reforms

The new Registrar General was a former Treasury official; he managed the office during a period of severe economic recession and further disclosures of corruption during the first half of the 1890s. By 1893 the department was considered a model of financial respectability. Problems of staff shortages and insufficient space for records and people were not solved so readily. From the time it was constructed the building in Elizabeth Street housing the Deeds Branch required ever increasing sums to maintain the fabric. By 1893 this amounted to over five hundred pounds (1). A new building was required but this solution could not be considered as the country slipped into severe recession. By the mid 1890s the branch also was experiencing recession as the number of applications and transfers declined due to the stagnant economy.

Further scandals led to the appointment of a second Royal Commission to enquire into the workings of the Department. This, along with major reforms in the Public Service led, in 1896, to the restructuring of the department whereby all branches were placed under one head. The changes did little to improve the factionalism, high turnover of staff and demoralisation that was endemic. At the same time new responsibilities and duties were placed on the department. By 1898 resources were stretched to the maximum and there was increasing unrest within and without the department.

The public collapse of credibility for the department enabled the newly appointed Registrar in 1898 to gain more staff and space. As well, his reorganisation of appointments, responsibilities and loyalties within the department eased the unhealthy atmosphere of working there. Changes were made to the Torrens system to facilitate conversion of Old Title to new including simplifying the system of examination within the department. However, despite intensive lobbying through the later years of the 1890s the issue of space for both records and staff remained
a constant and nagging problem. It was not to be solved until there was an upturn in both the Australian economy and the working of the department.
3.0
NEW BEGINNINGS

3.1 1900 - 1917: Remaking the Department - Creating A New Office

By the early years of the twentieth century great progress had been made in converting property to the Torrens system. The Land Titles Office, a term used to encompass several branches including Search and Survey, was the largest section of the Registrar General's Department. At Federation some former responsibilities, such as the Registration of Patents, was given over to Commonwealth bodies but the federalisation of land titles was strongly resisted by both the Department and those who used it. Over the first decade of the new century business related to land doubled. In response the staff of the department greatly increased; by 1913 2143 staff were employed there. The Registrar General, Williams, not only re-organised the department in these early years of the new century he was also responsible for the move to a new building that could adequately house the huge staff numbers and vast store of records.

By 1900 it had been estimated that the old office housed over 98 million pounds worth of documents in conditions that could not guarantee their safety and longevity (1). Shortages of space required the department to rent additional rooms as well as continuing to lease those already occupied in Blacks Buildings in Castlereagh Street. As well the costs of maintaining the building in Elizabeth Street continued to rise; in 1900-1901 this amounted to over six hundred pounds (2).

The site preferred for the new building, behind the Hyde Park Barracks and adjacent to St Marys Cathedral, had been selected by the Registrar General during the last years of the 1890s. At that time this land was partially occupied by the nineteenth century offices of the Colonial Architect, which backed onto the Barracks, and a path which led to those offices over the future site of the main portion of the later building. A timber yard associated with the Colonial Architect's office was also located partially on the block. Prior to these used the land had been occupied as a convict garden associated with Hyde Park Barracks and, during the 1830s, it had been considered as a possible location for a library (3). The land was reserved by the end of the nineteenth century in an overall proposal to create a legal precinct in this portion of the city. Eventually the new building for the Registrar General was one of the few aspects of this plan that did proceed; demolition of the Mint and Hyde Park Barracks to make way for law courts were only a few of the sweeping changes planned for the precinct that ultimately were not proceeded with (4).

The plans for the new building, which was to act as an intermediate stage or the core of a much greater building to be constructed in the future for the department, were prepared in 1903 by the Government Architect's Office of the Department of Public Works under the supervision of Walter Libery Vernon (5). The building was designed from the outset with the intention that it would have additional wings added to it. Constructed in plain brick it was said to have no windows of any importance on the southern side with the intention that this facade would
eventually be built over with the future extensions (6). It was described by Vernon in 1908 as a "barracks".

The builders for the new office were Loveridge and Hudson (7) and by the end of 1904 over 440 pounds had been spent on the project (8). Additional plans for the ground floor as well as several details were prepared in this year (9). By mid 1905 the Government Architect could report on the conclusion of the first stage of the project that,

"The apparent and increasing risk to which the valuable records in the Department were exposed induced a decision to erect on the site of the proposed Law Courts and Register General's buildings as much of the internal portion of the latter as would admit of the removal thereto of Births, Deaths and Marriages Branch and the Deeds Branch, both with their records. Although this portion of the building is not necessarily fireproof, yet it is to a great extent isolated and a great improvement upon the state of affairs existing before its erection. The building was carried out by contract" (10).

The final cost of the project was 7198 pounds and into this wing were moved the Deeds Branch from Elizabeth Street and Births, Deaths and Marriages department from Castlereaugh Street (11).

A few years later work commenced on the next stage of the project. In 1907 and 1908 plans were prepared for the western, southern and eastern wings (12). A parliamentary enquiry was initiated to enquire into the scope, design and cost of the works. The end result of this investigation was that the Committee recommended an increase in the budget for the project from 65,676 pounds to 76,658 pounds the difference to be accounted for by a modification to the design which required it to be built entirely of sandstone rather than a combination of brick and stone which had been the original intention of Vernon. His reasoning behind this decision had been to contain costs and produce a design that would "convey the impression that the building (was) one for working purposes rather than one designed for aesthetic reasons" (13).

However, the Parliamentary Standing Committee, on the advice of several prominent architects of the time including John Sulman, considered that the new building should compliment the nearby buildings including St Marys as well as those planned for the future (law courts on the site of the Mint and Hyde Park Barracks). As well it was considered important that the new building enhance the magnificent site then partially occupied by the office. Vernon completely agreed with the conclusions having only curbed his original design according to the Brief which required financial constraint (14).

The contract was let in 1909. In 1909-1910 the Government Architect reported on the parameters of this project;

"Erection of new offices (for Registrar General) 83,9777 pounds. Contractors Messrs Loveridge and Hudson. These new offices when completed present an imposing appearance worthy of the important site which they occupy. The
architectural style adopted is Perpendicular Gothic; the external walls of sandstone upon a base of trachyte. The building throughout is of fire resistant construction, the basement is occupied as vaults for the storage of valuable documents, records and registers which are deposited in the building. On the ground floor the eastern wing will be devoted to the Land Titles Office, the central portion to public offices and the western wing to Births, Deaths and Marriages Branch. The Deeds Branch, Deeds registers and the Drafting Room will be accommodated on the first floor. The second floor is set apart for the Registrar General's Room, the Examining Branch and storage for the Deeds Register, Caretaker's Quarters and other accommodation have been provided on the upper floor. A special feature which has been introduced in the construction of this building is the method of warming and ventilating. Fresh air will be extracted by means of specially constructed fans and ducts. The fresh air before being admitted to rooms will be filtered and purified "(15).

Detailed plans were prepared by the Government Architect's Branch for the new wing in 1910-1911. By mid 1911 over 29,000 pounds had been spent on the work but it was noted that the project had been delayed by the contractors having trouble locating stonemasons (16). A dearth of stonemasons continued to plague the project although the western wing had been completed by December 1911. This housed the Births, Deaths and Marriages Branch on the ground floor and the Deeds Branch on the upper floors. At this time considerable progress had been made on the southern and eastern wings despite, in addition to tradesmen, a shortage of stone for the work (17).

By mid 1913 the building had been essentially completed and it was anticipated that it would be fully occupied by the commencement of 1914. The delay was caused by a considerable amount of additional work that was executed with respect to office fittings, counters, partitions and the like (18). The final cost of the project was well over 91,000 pounds and it was anticipated even at that time that more space would be required for the future needs of the department "at no distant date". To that end provision had been made in the design for another wing on the northern side of the offices (19).

At its opening much comment was made on the size, details and technical accomplishment of the new building. The Sydney Morning Herald refereed to it as a "magnificent edifice" and drew attention to the spaciousness of the rooms and the abundance of natural light. The parquetry floors laid throughout were commented upon and the plenum system of heating and ventilation, with the furnace located in the basement, was considered to be particularly favourable. Two areas in particular were considered to be fine. These were the office of the Registrar General located on the second floor of the west wing, which was asserted to to be the finest office in Sydney (20), and the Land Titles Record Room with its sweeping entrance from College Street was thought to be largest chamber of its kind in the country (21).

The automatically closing fire doors, supplied by Elliot, Maclean and Co., which firm also supplied the steel for the building, drew much admiration (22) and generally, the construction applied to the building to ensure it being as fire-proof as possible, stone walls, concrete floors and steel doors, windows and frames,
was considered to be unique (23). As part of this aspect of the work the original wooden floors of the 1905 wing had been removed and replaced with concrete (24). Other than this little change had been made to the pre-existing wing other than some alterations to the northern windows.

Equally well received was the setting of the building in its environment. Isolated by means of necessity, as a fire precaution, the site was considered to be one of the best in Sydney, with Hyde Park as a "front garden" and a wide sweep of road. The new building was thought to enhance this place and complimented the Gothic style of the near-by St Marys Cathedral. It was claimed by professional journals to be one of the "finest architectural features" of the city (25).

Perhaps ironically, with the large and spacious new offices now completed, work in the department and staff declined almost immediately during the years of the First World War. Few changes were made to the building as a response to the war with the exception of a miniature rifle range which was formed in "a sort of yard" to provide a practice course for volunteers and rifle club members (26). Materials shortages as well precluded much work on the building during these years as well as the immediate post-war years; for example, wire rope needed to repair the lifts was in short supply at this time (27).

However, several changes were made to the duties and administration of the department which prepared it for the suburban boom of the 1920s. Staff increases after the war were required to cope with growing demands. Already by this time the new building was beginning to feel the pinch particularly in the area of the Land Titles Office which had outgrown the projections of the Government Architect.

3.2 1917 - 1939: Big Plans

A few relatively minor alterations were made to the new building in the first years after its completion. In 1922 plans were prepared for alterations to the Examiners Branch on the second floor (1). By the end of the 1920s the shortcomings of the new building were becoming evident and the first plans were prepared in 1927 for the proposed northern wing. More detailed plans for the wing were drawn throughout 1928 to 1930 (2) but the project, like thousands around the country, came to a halt as the effects of the 1930s Depression began to take hold of the economy. The last plans were prepared in 1930 at which time the estimated cost of the final phase of the building was 74,700 pounds (3).

As Australia sank into another depression the business of the office was drastically reduced and, as before in similar circumstances, staff were retrenched or redeployed to other departments; 59% were lost from the office between 1929 and 1931. Revenue also drastically declined at the same time. It was not until the later 1930s, with an upturn in the general economy as well as the introduction of new Acts, for example the Companies Act of 1936, that business in the department began to revive again. By 1937 transactions were said to be approaching a level that equaled those undertaken prior to the depression. Minor
works on the buildings were resumed; plans were prepared for a new door and sidelights to the corridor near the library (4). Almost symbolic of a return to better times were the celebrations for the sesquicentenary of NSW in 1938. The Land Titles Office, like many other public buildings, was decked in lights to celebrate the event (5).

3.3 1939 - 1945: Blackout

The commencement of the Second World War created another hiatus with staff leaving for active service and to new departments related to the war effort. Despite this the department had a full work load with activities such as secondment to help prepare military ordnance maps and searches related to rationing and child endowment. Work on the building, however, virtually came to a standstill. The only plans prepared during these years were for reinforcements and the installation of electric light in the basement of the northern wing. These drawings were prepared in 1942 (1) and the work carried out in that year.

The work was undertaken as a precaution in the event of a direct hit on the building. At the same time a new basement was constructed to help store records and act as a third air raid shelter; this became the basis of the future northern wing. Apart from these works the principal war time precautions amounted to stocking the shelters with large amounts of tea, installing stand pipes and hoses on the roofs of the eastern and western wings and black out materials on the windows (2). At the end of the war numerous requests had to be made to get the strutting removed from the basements, which were greatly reduced in space because of these supports, and the blackout paint from the windows (3).

3.4 1945 - 1967: Extensions and Renovations

After the war Sydney underwent another land boom which greatly increased the work of the department despite the low numbers of staff, some till in the forces and others on secondment. Staff numbers grew rapidly to 1950, although the department remained understaffed form some years, but many employees were new to the department and required training in the midst of the post-war pressures. The latter included not only the land boom and the enormous expansion of the suburbs but a rise in marriages and the birth rate.

In the midst of these problems the building was proving to be inadequate to meet the needs of the department particularly the Survey Drafting Branch. It was estimated that by the end of the 1950s the Companies and Births, Deaths and Marriages Branches would need to be housed elsewhere as the records relating to land would fill the entire Chancery Square building. As an emergency measure a demountable hut was erected on a triangle of land to the west of the western wing and this served, particularly the overflow of the survey department, until the construction of the northern wing.
Envisioned as part of the original design in 1905 and again in 1908 it had been argued strongly at the time that construction of the northern wing would in the long term be cheaper than building in piecemeal fashion. Although not required at the time for the Registrar General's purposes it could have been used for several other government departments which, at the beginning of the century, were renting accommodation throughout the city (1). Despite the arguments and incentives the work did not proceed until a critical point was again reached in the resources of the office.

A new set of plans for the northern wing were prepared by the Government Architects Branch in 1950 and the working drawings and specifications were completed in the period 1951 - 1952. The estimated cost of the new wing was 180,000 pounds (2). Work on the building commenced in 1954 and was completed in 1956 at which time it was officially opened by Premier Cahill (3). In the following years after its completion, despite post-war financial constraints, funds were found to maintain the building. In the period 1958-1959 this amounted to seven thousand pounds (4).

Almost immediately, as Sydney entered a long boom involving immense numbers of land transactions, plans were prepared to extend the northern wing. In 1959-61 sketches were prepared for an addition estimated to cost between 600,000 and 650,000 pounds (5). Work commenced in 1961-1962 and was then estimated to cost 769,000 pounds (6). The work comprising additions and alterations to the northern wing to act as a new records repository was completed in early 1963 (7).

The situation again reached a critical point by the end of the decade when in the period 1968 - 1973 Sydney experienced a massive boom both within the CBD and the suburbs. One response to this was the creation of the strata title, a revolutionary concept of three dimensional subdivision. With the offices of the department the new demands were met by another programme of extensions. In 1965-66 a Revenue Vote was made for 203,000 pounds and a loan vote for 100,000 pounds to fund further extensive renovations to the old buildings and alterations to the east wing, roof area and the provision of new accommodation, a fire escape and book lift (8). In the period 1966 -67 over $104,000 was voted to maintain the building (9).

3.5 1967 - 1996: Modernisation

From the early 1960s some improvements had been made that eased the immense burden on the Department brought about by its numerous and varied duties. In 1962 the Companies Branch moved out and in 1975 Births, Deaths and Marriages was finally established as a separate department within the responsibility of the Department of Services rather than that of the Attorney General and Justice, the umbrella department for the Registrar General's office. At the same time the Registrar General's department (renamed Land Titles Office in 1978), the Western Lands Commission and the Lands Department (renamed the Crown Lands Office) were all brought together as an enlarged Lands Department which was the core of the Lands and Forest portfolio. In 1986 the Land Titles
Office was returned to the Attorney General's Department. In 1988 the LTO was officially recognised as a separate administrative unit in the Natural Resources portfolio. Meanwhile storage of records and public space remained a critical issue. In 1973 several branch offices were housed in rented space in the Centrepoint building which, for a decade, would be the public office of the department.

Changes in the manner in which documents were copied and maintained eased some of the more critical problems of access. Changing technology greatly assisted the process, particularly the introduction of microfilming and the use of computers. The introduction of a Land Index in 1969 also made public and search access to the records more available. Several Acts of the later 1970s, including the Land Vendors (Amendment) Act made conveyancing an easier process and attempted to clear up some of the remaining confusion that remained from Old Systems Titles. The automation of the Torrens Register was a major breakthrough. By the 1980s New South Wales had the largest centralised system of recording land ownership in the world and it was the first to embrace computerised registration. By the 1990s the computerisation of the records of the department had become such that terminals in regional offices allow searchers access to the Sydney based records. Additional improvements have been made through the use of optical disc.

Commensurate with the improvements made to the technology employed within the building several programmes were initiated to modernise the the structure and services housed within it. In 1972 a major upgrade was made of the records wing (1). In the period 1973 - 1974 the electric services were completely overhauled (2). In 1983 the several branches that had operated in the Centrepoint building returned to the Queens Square building. In 1984-5 a major upgrade of the records branch basement level was undertaken at a cost of $0.07 million (3) and finally in 1990-91 another two major renovations programmes were carried out in the building (4).
4.0  SUPPLEMENTARY DOCUMENTATION

4.1  Endnotes to the Text

Section 2.0

1. The information for this section has generally been compiled from "From Parchments to Passwords A History of the Land Titles Office of New South Wales" (Crundwell, Golder and Wood., 1995) unless otherwise noted in the text as additional footnotes.

Section 2.5

1. Evidence of Parliamentary Standing Committee 1908., 6

2. Ibid.

Section 3.1

1. Quoted in Crundwell, Golder and Wood., From Parchments to Passwords., 75.


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