

History and Cultural Significance

History of Government Hill

By Annelise Connell

Government Hill – described in historical documents

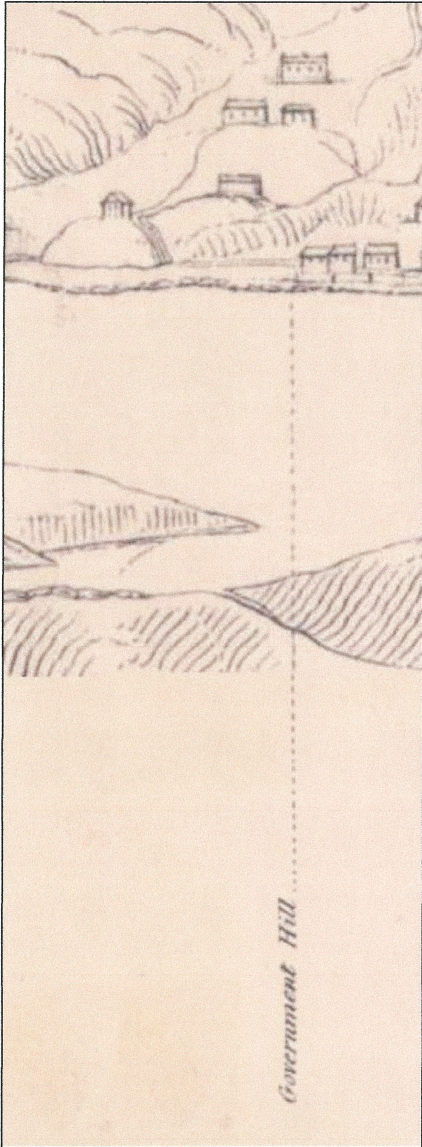
The Ice House, resumption by Government in 1930s

Central Government Office and Hong Kong People

A selection of photos, newspaper clipping from the 1950-60s and essays from Inmedia

A History of Hong Kong's "Government Hill"

By Annelise Connell



Shortly after the British took control of the island of Hong Kong in 1841, they established their Government offices and a gun battery on a cliff next to the shoreline.

Government correspondence was, as early as November 1841, datelined 'Government Hill'. As you can see in the "sketch map" Government Hill ran between the "Albany Nullah" (generally the route of Cotton Tree Drive) and "Glenealy Nullah" (part of which can still be seen at Robinson Road.)

In 1843, Governor Sir Henry Pottinger requested the head of Police to provide four Chinese night watchmen to protect the various buildings on "Government Hill"

A path built up to the Murray Battery was built and is still known as Battery Path,

The house on the far left on the 1846 sketch map, was Mr. Johnstone's house, rented for the Governor's use and before that as the Land Office. (It is now the Court of Final Appeal).

The topmost building was The Albany, used as civil officers' quarters, The middle three buildings were various Government Offices.

(The three buildings on the shoreline on the right were commercial.)

1846 - outline sketch map of Hong Kong Island (detail)

Source:
Hong Kong Public Library

Murray Battery

On the cliff was the Murray Battery. The guns had an unobstructed line of fire into the harbour. It was 150 ft above sea level being sited in a position to defend the town and the anchorage.

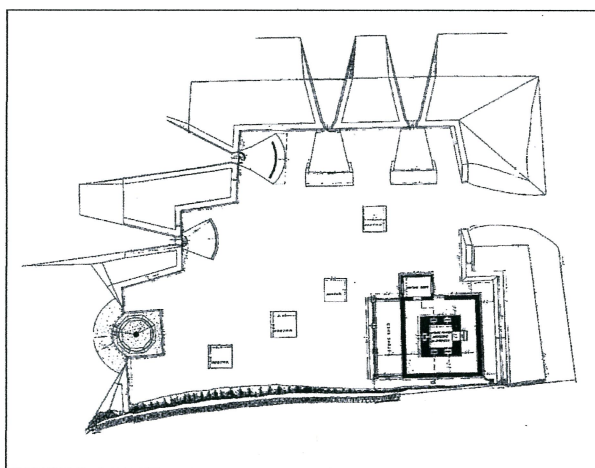
Plan of Hong Kong in 1845 (NA, WO 78/118) - Government Hill circled in blue



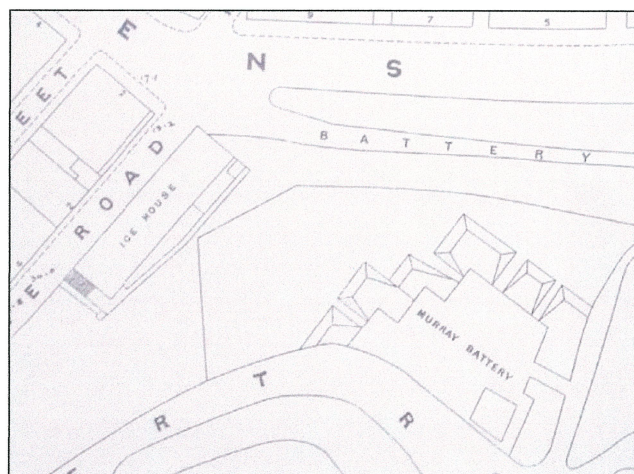
Government Office with the Murray Battery in the foreground



Murray Battery storehouse and one canon - Bottom left
Source: Hong Kong Public Library



Plan of Murray Battery
Source: Hong Kong Public Records Office



1904 Map showing Murray Battery and the Ice House
Source: Hong Kong Public Records Office

Public use of Battery Point at Murray Battery

Murray Battery was well used by the public to take in the view of early Hong Kong.

Many photographs were taken from Battery Point looking down Queen's Road.



1846 - View of Hong Kong and the Harbour Looking West from Murray's Battery

Source: Hong Kong Museum of History



Queen's Road from Battery Point c.1865

Source: Hong Kong Public Library

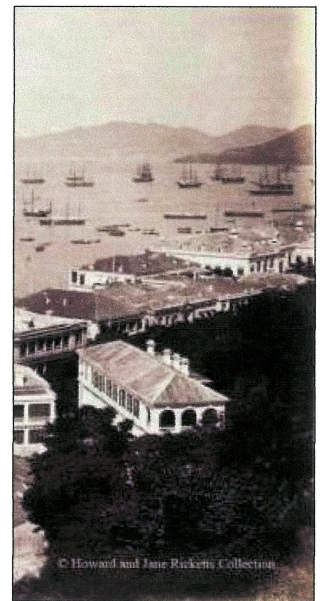
The Ice House

The original "Ice House" was between Duddell Street and Ice House Lane. The company that established it got the land free from the Government in 1843 as they were providing ice, at cost, to the Government, but it did not prosper and closed in about 1850.

The second company was more successful. In the 1860s the Ice Association was formed, and a few years later contracted with the Tudor Company of Boston which improved the Ice House that had been built on the corner of Battery Path and Ice House Street. They supplied ice at cost for hospitals. The land was formally leased in the early 1880s. Over time, ice was manufactured in Hong Kong, and the lease transferred to the company we now call Hong Kong Land.



The Ice House (left) corner of Battery Path and Ice House Street
Source Hong Kong Public Library

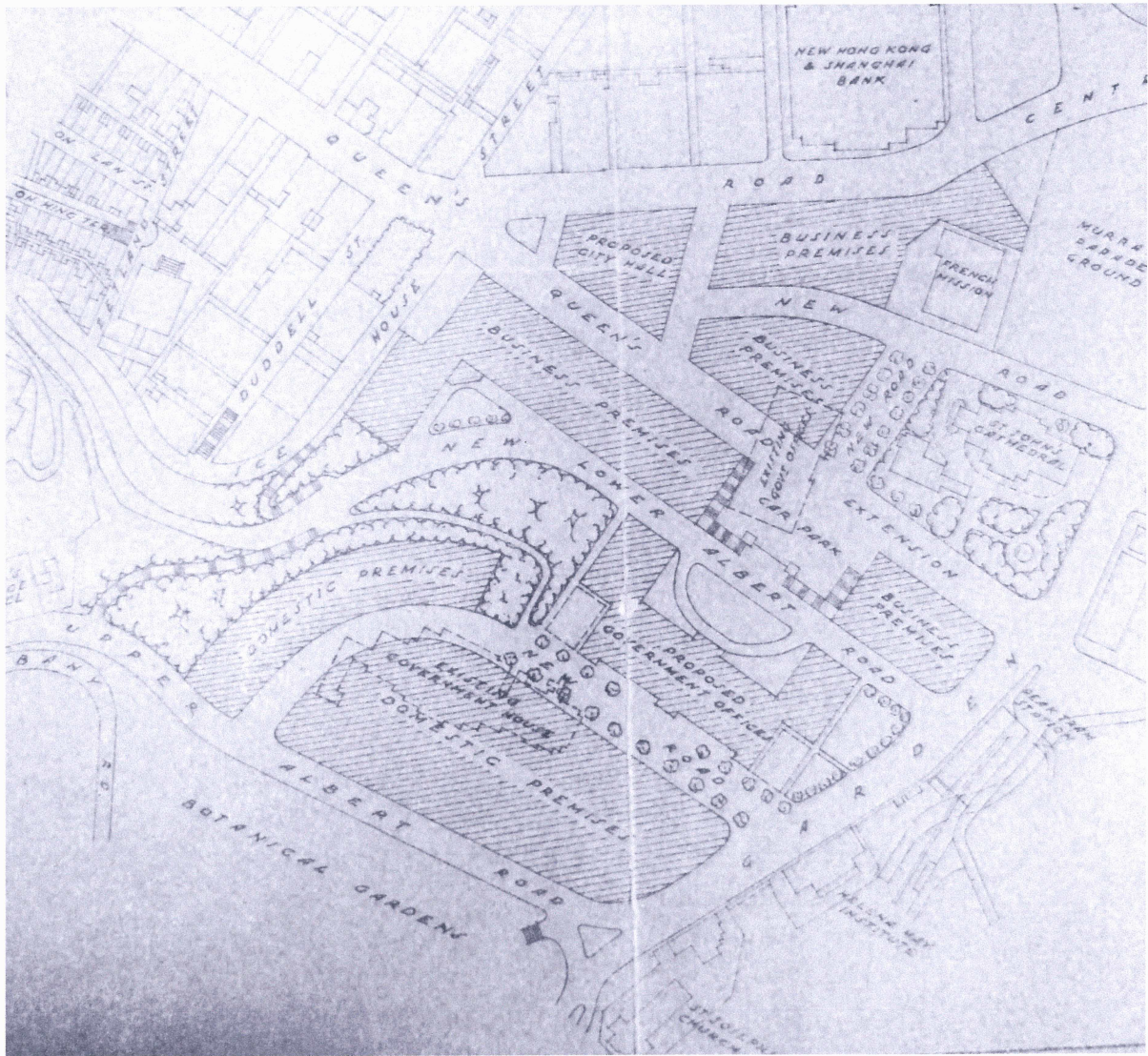


Ice House, center foreground
Source: Private collection

The failed attempt to sell historic Government Hill in the 1930s

In the early 1930s the Public Works Department, came up with two plans. One was to tear down the old City Hall and sell the land. They sold half the land to Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation, under the "City Hall Scheme". This plan succeeded. Hong Kong lost its City Hall and its prime site, and the iconic HSBC building was built.

A second plan to sell off most of Government Hill, including Government House, failed.



Plan of the proposed redevelopment of Government Hill in 1933

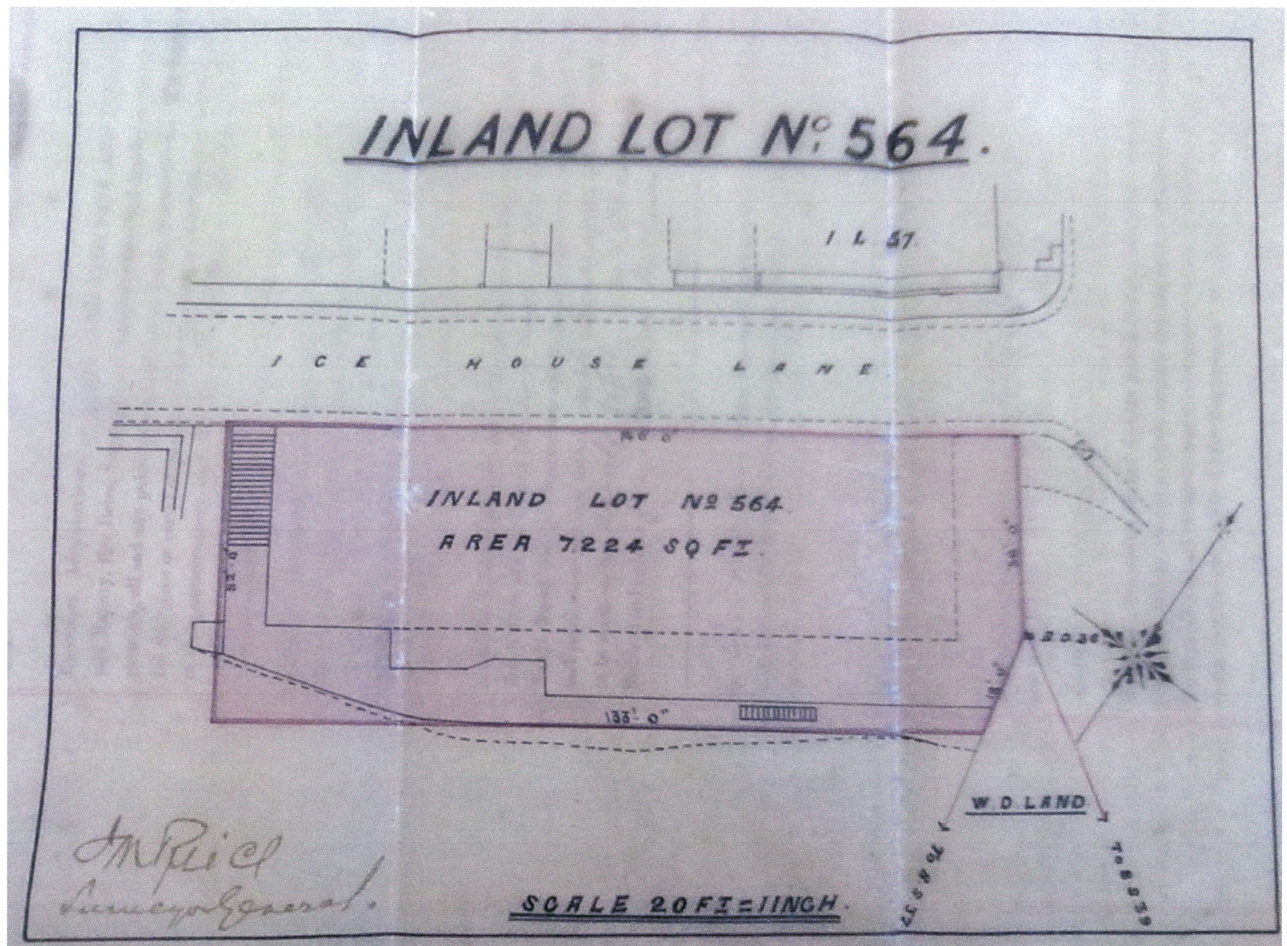
Source: Hong Kong Public Records Office

... and the resumption of the Ice House - Inland Lot 564

An ordinance was passed in called the ‘Government House and City Development Scheme’ and the money from the sale of City Hall to HSBC was put into the fund.

Resumption of the Ice House

However, in the early days of the scheme, Hong Kong Land applied to redevelop the Ice House. Government balked, because it would put a crimp in their scheme, and so they forced Hong Kong Land to sell the Ice House back to the Government, claiming it was for a “public purpose”.



Source: Hong Kong Public Records Office

City Development Scheme abandoned

When Sir Andrew Caldecott became Governor in 1935 he was vehemently opposed to the whole scheme because he disliked the idea of intensive development of the Government House and neighbouring sites, and saw no need for the rebuilding Government House up at Magazine Gap. Given his opposition, the plan did not move forward, and in 1937, in LegCo it was described as “*vandalistic commercialization of what should be one of the most beautiful parts of Hong Kong*”. Without support, the City Development Scheme faded. In 1939 the Ordinance was repealed and the remaining money put into general fund.

Air Raid Tunnels



Digital Image © 2008 University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries

Underneath Government Hill is a network of old air raid tunnels constructed from 1940-41.

A plan below highlights the tunnels underneath the CGO and the location of the portals.

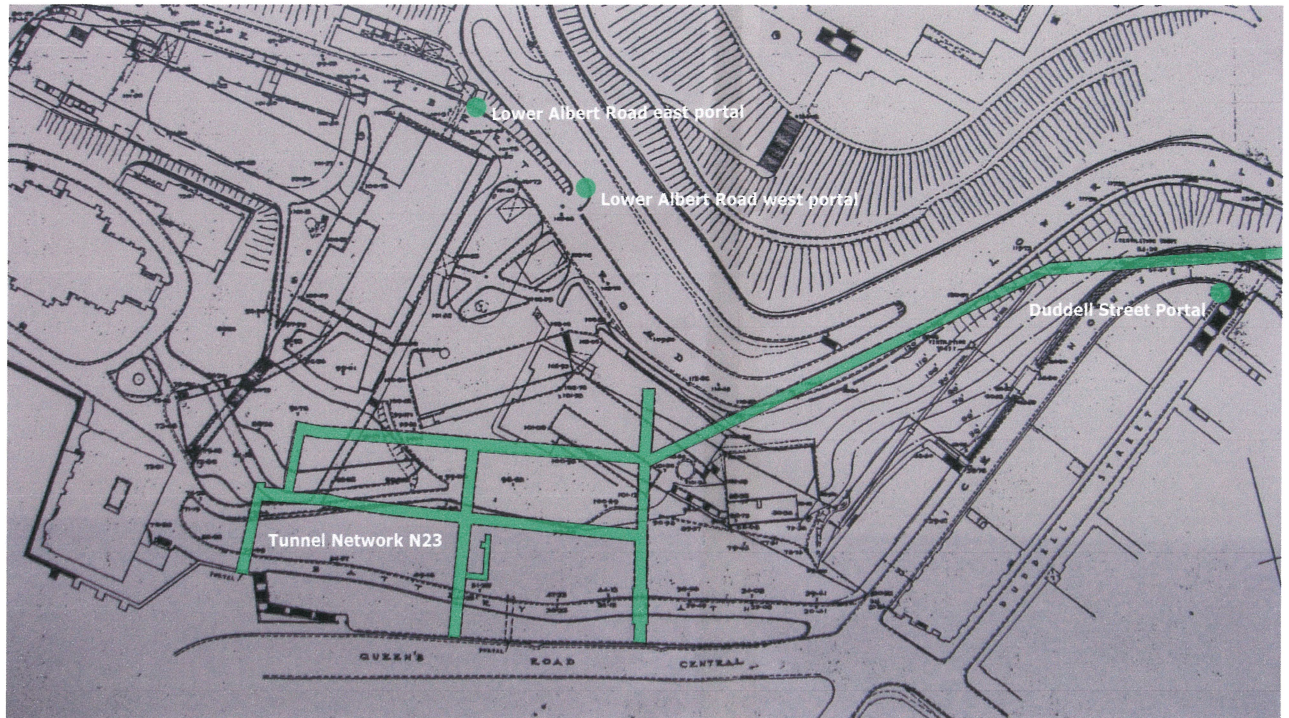
Some of the entrances, or “portals” to the tunnels still exist.

Two to the Government House tunnels can be easily seen on Lower Albert Road and there is one under the Duddell Street steps.

Air Raid Tunnels next to the Battery Path steps

Source: *University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries*

Historical Value of Air Raid Tunnels



Quotes from the *Hong Kong Telegraph*

Feb 1941 - Ventilation tests of the Battery Path Tunnel opposite the HSBC were carried out with satisfactory results. 1500 workmen and labourers were used.

Mar 1941 - Work commenced on the Lower Albert Rd / Wyndham and Ice house St Tunnel network.

Sep 1941 - 21 sites had been excavated and could accommodate 200 000 people.

From Miss B C Redwood's diary, 1941

Source: Gwulo.com

10 Dec: Went in Battery Path Tunnel in alarm when on way to town. It was more orderly than I had expected (despite large numbers of interested rather than frightened Chinese).

11 Dec: Our office may be moving to C.S.O.tunnel.

12 Dec: Mabel has joined the V.A.D.s and sleeps down below (the hospital) in air raid shelter.

13 Dec: Mr Puckle gave me a lift to the C.S.O. tunnel. Peggy Wilson had already arrived. Our job was to keep a log of the events (mostly messages per telephone call) and also to make out identification cards for the ARP people. It was boiling hot in the tunnel, and I was glad to short-sleeved jumper.

14 Dec: Then I went up to the Tunnel. The Central Police Station was bombed badly in the afternoon. Felt the concussions even in the tunnel.

[Ed: She writes that memories of the next few days were very mixed up, but that at the start of each day she...] "jammed on tin hat and slung respirator, and - provided there were no raids on - scrambled up Battery Path to Tunnel"

我們的政府山 *our Government Hill*

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"Government Hill" in print

1841

in a letter dated 24 August 1841 from Alexander Johnston, referring to himself as "Deputy Superintendent charged with the Government of the Island of Hong Kong", written from "Government Hill, Hong Kong" to G A Bushby, Secretary to the Governor of India, Johnston, stated:

"... I have now to inform you that I have made regulations for a post office at this point, and I have to request that instructions may be given to the proper authorities...to address all mails for the Chinese Expedition as well as others that may be made up at the different post offices for this country to the Postmaster at Hong Kong.

1842

The retrospect of January 1842 already quoted from the *Canton Press* speaks of 'Government Hill' on which 'a public office to serve as a temporary residence for the head of the Government is just finished'.

1843

The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London, , Volumes 13-14 (Google eBook)
J. Murray - Gardening

The eastern end of the island is divided from the centre by two deep ravines both running from the same eminence the one in a SE direction which terminates in Tie tam Bay and the other in a northerly direction and terminating in the small valley of Wang nie chong The western part of the island is likewise divided from the centre by two ravines both running from the same eminence the one to the S terminating in a small undulating piece of country on which the village of Pok foo lum is situated and the other to the north where it spreads out and forms **Government Hill** and the small flat beneath Small streams run down all these ravines and they quickly swell into torrents when rain falls but what is remarkable they never fail to furnish water in the driest season of the year.

The eastern end of the island is divided from the centre by two deep ravines, both running from the same eminence—the one in a S.E. direction, which terminates in Tie-tam Bay, and the other in a northerly direction, and terminating in the small valley of Wang-nie-chong. The western part of the island is likewise divided from the centre by two ravines, both running from the same eminence—the one to the S. terminating in a small undulating piece of country, on which the village of Pok-foo-lum is situated, and the other to the north, where it spreads out and forms Government Hill and the small flat beneath. Small streams run down all these ravines, and they quickly swell into torrents when rain falls; but, what is remarkable, they never fail to furnish water in the driest season of the year. There are

Friend of China newspaper 8.6.43 edition

Notices:

E Farncomb, solicitor and Notary Public, has for sale several extensive marine lots with deep water frontage and with convenient bungalows having delightful views of the harbour and town; he also has some large plots of land for building. The property is contiguous with **government hill** in a first rate locality and forms a desirable and safe investment.

1843

Report From Commisioners: Seventeen Volumes (Google eBook)

No 32 REPORT
by Mr Gordon on
Plan of the Town of Victoria

6 July 1 843
Land Office Victoria Hong Kong

Sir,

I HAVE the honour to lay before you for the information of his Excellency the Governor the following report of the present state of the roads and buildings in this colony with some remarks upon the plans I would propose to be adopted in future It is now not probable that the survey of the northern part of the island at present in progress will be completed in time for me to lay down upon it any of the improvements I suggest but I shall be able to refer to it by the number of lots and otherwise so that I believe there will be no difficulty in understanding all I wish to express

A glance at the town as it at present stands upon the survey will show that more regularity might have been preserved in the buildings upon either side of the Queen's Road but though it is to be regretted that this has not been attended to still the most material point a good and sufficient width of street has been secured for in no place is this road less than fifty 50 feet wide and in general it much

exceeds that Of all the various contracts which have been entered into for the completion of different portions of it one remark may be made that without exception they were undertaken at prices for which it was utterly impossible they could lie done and therefore much delay was caused for when the contractors were unable to complete their work they either were imprisoned for non fulfilment of their contracts or absconded to save themselves from the consequences of having broken them and even now with the experience they have had the Chinese can only form a tolerably accurate estimate when the matter is put before them in the simplest possible manner and giving length and breadth with an uniform depth of cutting throughout

On looking at the survey the present length of the Queen's Road will be seen and it is being extended both to the eastward and westward The former however is the direction in which it is more immediately required as several dwelling houses have been already built in that neighbourhood and also the extensive warehouses and bazaars of Messrs Jardine Matheson & Co to which there is as yet no approach for carriages I would propose that the Queen's Road be continued entirely round the island and I am satisfied from personal inspection that though in some places there will be heavy work there is nothing to prevent the plan being carried out and it appears to me that such a road would be highly desirable not merely as a matter of convenience to the inhabitants but as a means of moving troops with speed and facility to any part of the island where they may happen to be required for the protection of the different villages

It is a matter of necessity from the hilly and uneven nature of the ground in this island that any plan of a town must be of a somewhat irregular or straggling nature I would propose that along the southern side of the Queen's Road eastwards from **Government Hill** as far as town lot marked No 14 on the survey there

HONG KONG.

(No. 32.)

REPORT by Mr. Gordon on Plan of the Town of Victoria.

Land Office, Victoria, Hong Kong,
6 July 1843.

Appendix, No. 26.
Report by Mr. Gordon on Plan of the Town of Victoria.

Sir,

I HAVE the honour to lay before you, for the information of his Excellency the Governor, the following report of the present state of the roads and buildings in this colony, with some remarks upon the plans I would propose to be adopted in future. It is now not probable that the survey of the northern part of the island, at present in progress, will be completed in time for me to lay down upon it any of the improvements I suggest; but I shall be able to refer to it by the number of lots and otherwise; so that I believe there will be no difficulty in understanding all I wish to express.

A glance at the town, as it at present stands upon the survey, will show that more regularity might have been preserved in the buildings upon either side of the "Queen's Road;" but though it is to be regretted that this has not been attended to, still the most material point, a good and sufficient width of street, has been secured, for in no place is this road less than fifty (50) feet wide, and in general it much exceeds that. Of all the various contracts which have been entered into for the completion of different portions of it, one remark may be made, that, without exception, they were undertaken at prices for which it was utterly impossible they could be done, and therefore much delay was caused; for when the contractors were unable to complete their work, they either were imprisoned for non-fulfilment of their contracts, or absconded to save themselves from the consequences of having broken them; and even now, with the experience they have had, the Chinese can only form a tolerably accurate estimate when the matter is put before them in the simplest possible manner, and giving length and breadth, with an uniform depth of cutting throughout.

On looking at the survey, the present length of the Queen's Road will be seen, and it is being extended both to the eastward and westward. The former, however, is the direction in which it is more immediately required, as several dwelling houses have been already built in that neighbourhood, and also the extensive warehouses and bazaars of Messrs. Jardine, Matheson, & Co., to which there is, as yet, no approach for carriages. I would propose that the Queen's Road be continued entirely round the island; and I am satisfied, from personal inspection, that though in some places there will be heavy work, there is nothing to prevent the plan being carried out; and it appears to me, that such a road would be highly desirable, not merely as a matter of convenience to the inhabitants, but as a means of moving troops with speed and facility to any part of the island where they may happen to be required for the protection of the different villages.

It is a matter of necessity, from the hilly and uneven nature of the ground in this island, that any plan of a town must be of a somewhat irregular or straggling nature. I would propose, that along the southern side of the Queen's Road eastwards from Government Hill, as far as town lot marked No. 14 on the survey, there should be lots for European shops and dwelling-houses, and along a part of this distance (to the eastward of the burial ground) there might be a terrace more to the southward, or further up the hill, where I think houses will be much in request for various persons in the employment of the merchants, who have already purchased, or may purchase marine lots opposite. Upon the northern side of the Queen's Road, for the same distance, there are a number of valuable lots with sea frontage, as will be seen in the survey; some of these have already been built upon, having been sold by Captain Elliot, or granted by Mr. Johnston.

As a situation for the town now to be founded, I would strongly recommend the Wong-nei-chung Valley; but as I have not yet seen a survey of it, I am unable to specify the precise quantity of land available, but with what would be reclaimed by the plan I shall propose, there would be ample room for a town.

I propose

should be lots for European shops and dwelling houses and along a part of this distance to the eastward of the burial ground there might be a terrace more to the southward or further up the hill where I think houses will be much in request for various persons in the employment of the merchants who have already purchased or may purchase marine lots opposite Upon the northern side of the Queen's Road for the same distance there are a number of valuable lots with sea frontage as will be seen in the survey some of these have already been built upon having been sold by Captain Elliot or granted by Mr Johnston

As a situation for the town now to be founded I would strongly recommend the Wong nei chung Valley but as I have not yet seen a survey of it I am unable to specify the precise quantity of land available but with what would be reclaimed by the plan I shall propose there would be ample room for a town

I propose to build a sea wall from a point at the foot of the hill marked No 84 on the survey known as the Morrison Education Society Hill to one at that marked suburban lot No 2 the property of Messrs Jardine Matheson & Co Up the centre of the valley I would have a canal with gates to the sea sufficiently deep to admit of large junks cargo boats coining up

Along the front wall leaving of course ample width for roadway there would be an extensive range of warehouses and for a certain distance up the valley say to the present line of the Queen's Road I would allow only European houses and shops Across the road to the southward a Chinese town might be built I further propose to have a road of sufficient width entirely round the town at the foot of the surrounding hills and all the streets to be parallel to the sea wall in the front passing from a broad road on each side of the canal into this circular road I am aware it may be thought advisable for the sake of air at particular seasons to have the streets at right angles to the direction I have described but I think it very probable that it will be found advisable to have various small branches from the canal into different streets in the Chinese part of the town so as to enable the merchants to have the cargoes landed from their junks at their own shops and this could only be done by having the streets in the direction I have pointed out However if they are made wide I believe there is no reason to fear the want of good air and in the European part of the town there might be streets at right angles to those already mentioned

This plan might be carried into execution either by a grant from Her Majesty's Government for the whole expense of the sea wall and canal and then letting out the various lots binding the tenants to build according to a given plan or it might be done by letting the land as it at present stands to a company which could probably be formed for the purpose upon condition of their carrying out the plan as laid down for them

The circular road would open up and render available a great number of sites for villas round the foot of the hills by which the Wong nei chung Valley is surrounded

To the westward of the **Government Hill** the Queen's Road has not been completed quite so far the West Point Barracks up to which point it is in progress and it will then be continued round Navy Bay Along the

COLONIAL LAND AND EMIGRATION COMMISSIONERS. 51

I propose to build a sea wall from a point at the foot of the hill marked No. 84 on the survey, known as the "Morrison Education Society Hill," to one at that marked suburban lot, No. 2, the property of Messrs. Jardine, Matheson & Co. Up the centre of the valley I would have a canal, with gates to the sea, sufficiently deep to admit of large junks (cargo boats) coming up.

Along the front wall, leaving of course ample width for roadway, there would be an extensive range of warehouses; and for a certain distance, up the valley, say to the present line of the Queen's Road, I would allow only European houses and shops. Across the road, to the southward, a Chinese town might be built. I further propose to have a road of sufficient width entirely round the town, at the foot of the surrounding hills, and all the streets to be parallel to the sea wall in the front, passing from a broad road on each side of the canal into this circular road. I am aware it may be thought advisable, for the sake of air at particular seasons, to have the streets at right angles to the direction I have described; but I think it very probable that it will be found advisable to have various small branches from the canal into different streets in the Chinese part of the town, so as to enable the merchants to have the cargoes landed from their junks at their own shops; and this could only be done by having the streets in the direction I have pointed out. However, if they are made wide, I believe there is no reason to fear the want of good air, and in the European part of the town there might be streets at right angles to those already mentioned.

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The circular road would open up and render available a great number of sites for villas round the foot of the hills by which the Wong-nei-chung Valley is surrounded.

To the westward of the Government Hill the Queen's Road has not been completed quite so far the West Point Barracks, up to which point it is in progress, and it will then be continued round Navy Bay.

Along the northern side of the road, from the lower bazaar to the west barracks, there will be a number of lots with sea frontage; and upon the opposite side a row of shops or dwelling-houses, with some good situations for villas further up the hill.

In what constitutes now the bulk of the town (between Government Hill and the lower bazaar) it appears to me that the present disposition of streets must be followed out; but more regard will be paid to uniformity and regularity in building than has hitherto been done. In this locality there are still some valuable lots of land not disposed of, and along the northern side of the road a few marine lots have been retained by the Government.

His Excellency the Governor has, I believe, already decided that the church is to be built on the flat space at the front of Government Hill. On the face of this hill, a little more to the southward, I propose to erect the buildings which will be required for courts of law, and various other offices. There is ample space for two ranges or terraces without going further up the hill than the situation known as the "Acclimatizing Barracks," and thus the present Government house, with whatever additions may be required there, for the secretaries and personal staff of His Excellency the Governor, will remain as at present, isolated from all other buildings; nor will any of those proposed interfere with the views from it. His Excellency the Governor has already spoken of having a space of land reclaimed from the sea in front of this hill, in order to form a public landing place, with an esplanade or public walk. I propose that a praya should be carried out in front of all the buildings, both eastward and westward from Government Hill. Eastwards I would have it extend at least as far as the rocks, at the foot of lot marked No. 86, in the survey, (the Heerjeebhoy Hospital Hill); but if my plan for reclaiming the land in front of the Wong-nei-chung Valley were to be carried out, then I would have the praya to go round the foot of the hill, and join the sea wall enclosing the reclaimed land; and I would also continue it eastwards of the valley to the "Point," the property of Messrs. Jardine, Matheson & Co. Westwards from Government Hill the praya might be extended as far as Navy Bay, and the land thus reclaimed would form a number of very valuable marine lots. The part

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1844

The New monthly magazine and universal register. [Continued as] The New monthly magazine and literary journal (and humorist) [afterw.] The New monthly (magazine).

A small Baptist chapel built by subscription lifts up its head but is no great ornament to the place whereas the buildings belonging to the Morrison Education Society the Medical Missionary and Seamen's Hospitals have most excellent sites on hills projecting into the harbour and are very agreeable objects in the view of the town as also are some elegant and extensive premises belonging to the Catholics and situated on the side of the mountain behind **government hill** Beside these which are either built or in the course of erection subscriptions have

been collected for an exchange and circulating or public reading rooms and surveys have been made for the selection of places adapted for the making of docks watering places &c I will only further remark that the part of the town principally inhabited by the Chinese is to the eastward of government hill and that the streets in it are clean and broad which latter circumstance must nearly break the hearts of the blackhaired race and is a convincing proof that they have not been allowed to follow their own inclinations

A small Baptist chapel, built by subscription, lifts up its head, but is no great ornament to the place ; whereas the buildings belonging to the Morrison Education Society, the Medical, Missionary, and Seamen's Hospitals, have most excellent sites, on hills projecting into the harbour, and are very agreeable objects in the view of the town, as also are some elegant and extensive premises belonging to the Catholics, and situated on the side of the mountain behind government-hill. Beside these, which are either built, or in the course of erection, subscriptions have been collected for an exchange and circulating or public reading-rooms, and surveys have been made for the selection of places adapted for the making of docks, watering-places, &c.

I will only further remark that the part of the town principally inhabited by the Chinese is to the eastward of government-hill, and that the streets in it are clean and broad, which latter circumstance must nearly break the hearts of the blackhaired race, and is a convincing proof that they have not been allowed to follow their own inclinations.