

INFORMATION NOTE

The Legislative Council Building

1. Location

1.1 The Legislative Council Building (the Building) is situated at 8 Jackson Road, Central -- the heart of the central business district of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR).

2. History

2.1 The Building formerly housed the Supreme Court of Hong Kong. Incidentally, it was the Legislative Council which resolved on 28 February 1898 that "new Law Courts", i.e. the Supreme Court Building, be built.

2.2 The Building was designed by Aston Webb and E. Ingress Bell, consulting architects to the Crown Agents to the Colonies. They were leading architects at the time and their notable works included the southern façade of the Buckingham Palace. They prepared the drawings for the Building in 1899. The drawing showing the west elevation of the Building is reproduced below.



2.3 The construction of the Building started in 1900 and took 12 years to complete. The foundation stone, built into a column facing Statue Square, was laid in 1903. However, the construction process was delayed by the insufficient supply of suitable granite and masons and the death of the contractor. On 15 January 1912, the Building was opened by the then Governor Sir Frederick Lugard. In the following seven decades, the Building housed the Supreme Court of Hong Kong except in the period of Japanese occupation.

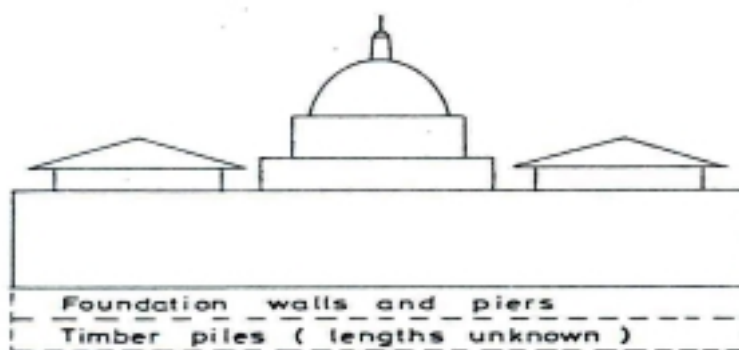
2.4 During World War II, Japan occupied Hong Kong between December 1941 and August 1945, and the Building became the headquarters of the Hong Kong Military Police.

2.5 In 1978, the construction work of the Mass Transit Railway led to cracks in the structure and the Building was closed for reinstatement works. On 24 May 1983, the Executive Council approved the declaration of the exterior of the Building as being of historic interest. In 1984, the exterior of the Building was declared a monument, protected legally under the Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance.

2.6 In 1983, the Executive Council also approved the plan to convert the former court house into the home of the Legislative Council, and the Architectural Services Department started the conversion work in 1984. In addition to the interior works, the Architectural Services Department was responsible for improving the immediate environs of the Building in a manner appropriate to the precincts of the legislature. In this connection, a portion of Jackson Road was closed to link the Building with the Chater Garden, and the boundary of the Building was delineated by cast-iron bollards and lamp-posts. The conversion work was completed in October 1985.

3. Foundation

3.1 To form the foundation of the Building, hundreds of Chinese Fir tree trunks were driven into the mixture of reclamation materials and silt on the site. Therefore, the Building is in effect "floating" on a timber raft (see the figure below). To be fully effective, such a foundation system requires the ground water level to be maintained at a constant level. Accordingly, a ground water replenishment system is installed to replace ground water as required.



4. Exterior

4.1 As mentioned in paragraph 2.5, the exterior of the Building is a monument. The architectural significance of the Building lies with its neoclassical¹ style and the incorporation of Far Eastern characteristics in the style.

Neoclassical style

4.2 The plan of the Building follows a rectangular pattern and is symmetrical. The Building occupies an area of around 2 660 sq m (about 70 m by 38 m) and is surrounded by columns. The height of the Building, from street level to the highest point, which is in the form of a Tudor crown, is about 40 m. The size of this three-storey granite structure projects a monumental portrait, a characteristic of neoclassical buildings.

4.3 Conforming to the building designs of ancient Rome and Greece, the Building is surrounded by Ionic order (or style) columns, each of which is about 17 m high and consists of a base, a cylindrical shaft and a capital (see the figure on page 1). Compared to a typical Ionic order column, Ionic order columns of the Building do not have grooves on their shafts.²

Carvings

4.4 The central section of the Building facing Statue Square is surmounted by a pediment.³ The pediment is topped by a Statue of Justice and under it is the inscription "Erected AD MDCCCX" (Erected AD 1910) (see the figure on page 1).

4.5 The pediment incorporates a semi-circular window and the carving of the British Royal Coat of Arms is above it. The shield shows the various royal emblems of the various parts of the United Kingdom: the three lions of England in the first and fourth quarters, the lion of Scotland in the second and the harp of Ireland in the third. The shield is supported by the English lion and Scottish unicorn and is surmounted by the Royal crown. The motto of the Sovereign, *Dieu et mon droit* (God and my right), is displayed underneath it. The figures of Mercy and Truth are located on both sides of the British Royal Coat of Arms.

¹ According to *Cambridge International Dictionary of English*, "neoclassical" means "*made in a style which is based on the art and building designs of ancient Rome and Greece.*"

² According to the Roman architectural historian, Marcus Vitruvius Pollio, the Ionic order column, using the female figure as the standard, originates from the construction of temples in Ionia (nowadays Turkey). A typical Ionic order column is eight times as tall as the diameter of the shaft to produce a more lofty effect. The paired volutes at its capital represent graceful curling hair hanging on each side. Moreover, the flutes (grooves) on its shaft bear a resemblance to the folds of a matronal garment and carved rings at its base symbolize a shoe to the foot.

³ The triangular part above the entrance of a building in ancient Greece or Rome.

4.6 On top of the pediment of the Building is a 2.7 m high Statue of Justice⁴, represented by Themis. She has a pair of scales in her right hand and a sword in her left hand; the scales represent fairness and the sword is a symbol of power. She is blindfolded, which represents impartiality. Overall, the Statue of Justice embodies the spirit of law.

4.7 The highest point of the Building is a bronze Tudor crown. The Tudor crown is also called the imperial crown or King's crown, which has a rounded top. It was introduced by King Edward VII of the United Kingdom in 1902 and was in use until the accession of Queen Elizabeth II to the throne in 1953.

4.8 The carvings reflected the functions of the Building and the sovereignty of the territory at the time when the Building was built.

The dome

4.9 Rising above the centre of the Building is a dome mounted on a circular drum. The dome is surmounted by a lantern, on the top of which is the bronze Tudor crown mentioned above. The dome of the Building is faced with pre-cast concrete tiles which have half-round rolls covering their vertical joints and rise to meet the base of the lantern. The dome is supported by steelwork inside (see the figure on Appendix IV).

4.10 The drum has plain squared granite for its lower half and a Doric order colonnade supporting a lintel for its upper half. Compared to a typical Doric order column, the Doric order columns of the Building are not fluted.⁵

Far Eastern characteristics

4.11 Adapted to the sub-tropical climate of Hong Kong, the Building has a wide arcade on the ground floor and balconies on the first floor. The purposes of the arcade and balconies are to prevent direct sunlight from shining into the Building and to diffuse heat.

4.12 The Chinese influence on the Building can be seen from its hip roofs which are covered by doubled-layered Chinese tiles and the eaves which are supported on ornately carved teak brackets in the Chinese tradition.

⁴ Portraying Justice as a female figure dates back to depictions of Themis and Justitia in ancient mythology. Themis, known for her clear-sightedness, is the Greek Goddess of Justice and Law. In Roman mythology, Justitia (Justice) is one of the four Virtues along with Prudence, Fortitude and Temperance.

⁵ Contrasting with the Ionic order column, the Doric order column uses male as the standard. A typical Doric order column is four to six times as tall as the diameter of the shaft, with a fluted shaft, plain saucer-shaped capitals and no base. The design of a Doric order column is to exhibit the proportions, strength, and beauty of the body of a man.

5. Interior

5.1 Throughout its years as the Supreme Court of Hong Kong, the interior of the Building was altered many times to increase the number of courtrooms and ancillary rooms. In 1984 and 1985, major works were carried out to convert the Building into the home of the Legislative Council. Since 1985, some interior alterations of the Building have been made. The following paragraphs trace the major changes to the interior configuration of the Building. The original floor plans of both the Supreme Court and the Legislative Council are in the Appendices.

Entrance

5.2 The Building originally had five entrances and they were designated for various users of the Supreme Court. Among the three entrances facing Statue Square, the entrance in the middle was the prisoners' entrance, and has not been used after the Legislative Council has moved in. The other two entrances have served as public entrances throughout the Building's history. The current Members' entrance and staff's entrance, on the other side of the Building facing Jackson Road, were once the entrances for registrars and clerical staff, and for judges respectively (see Appendices I and IV).

Basement

5.3 The basement of the Building was originally used to house the central heating system. At present, the basement is being used as a plant room.

Ground floor

5.4 The ground floor of the Building, in the Supreme Court years, originally housed the Land and Registrar offices, counters to serve the public, and facilities to receive prisoners. Near the prisoners' entrance were cells for prisoners, the prisoners' receiving room and the constable's waiting room. On the side facing Jackson Road near the judges' entrance was a room for bailiffs. Internal staircases and an internal bridge called "Bridge of Sighs" were installed to connect the prisoners' receiving room and cells with courtrooms on the first floor (see Appendix I). After World War II, some of the offices on this floor was converted into three additional courtrooms.

5.5 The ground floor of the Legislative Council Building had been used as office accommodation for staff of the Legislative Council Secretariat. In early 2003, some of the staff offices were converted into Members' Rooms.

First and second floors

Supreme Court Building

5.6 The first and second floors of the Building during the Supreme Court era were used as courtrooms and facilities for judicial personnel. The three courtrooms on the first floor rose through two storeys (see Appendices II and III)⁶.

5.7 In the 1950s, additional floors were inserted at the second floor level in the courtrooms at both ends of the Building for extra courtrooms and ancillary rooms. It was also proposed in 1960 to insert an extra floor at the second floor level in the courtroom under the dome (the large courtroom). However, this proposal was not proceeded with because of fears over the effect of the extra weight on the piled foundations. After many rounds of alterations, there were seven courtrooms on the first and second floors and the large courtroom became the library by the 1970s.

Legislative Council Building

5.8 To meet the needs of the Legislative Council, its Members and staff, the interior of the Building was reconfigured in 1984. A major feature was that the library (the original large courtroom) near the end of the Supreme Court era was converted into the Council Chamber.

5.9 On the first floor, courtrooms and ancillary rooms adjacent to Chater Road were converted into Conference Rooms B and C. Courtrooms and ancillary rooms on the Des Voeux Road Central side were converted into the Press Room and Conference Room A, which was later converted into the present Press Conference Room. Judges' rooms overlooking Jackson Road were converted into the President's Suite and staff offices. Rooms facing Statue Square were once merged into a unified space which was used as the library of the Supreme Court. The library rose through two storeys and had a surrounding gallery at the second floor level, providing additional shelving. The gallery was concealed above a false ceiling when the library was relocated. The concealed gallery was exposed when the false ceiling was removed during refurbishment works. The space is now used as the Ante-Chamber.

⁶ By the completion of the Building, the library became a courtroom.

5.10 Several conversions were made on the second floor. Courtrooms and ancillary rooms on the Chater Road side were combined to form the Dining Hall. Courtrooms and ancillary rooms facing Des Voeux Road Central were converted into staff offices, which were later converted into Conference Room A. Judicial personnel offices facing Jackson Road were converted into Members' Rooms. Store rooms facing Statue Square were converted into Radio Rooms.

Council Chamber and Ante-Chamber

5.11 The Council Chamber occupies an area of about 300 sq m. The design of the Council Chamber harmonizes with the neoclassical qualities of the exterior of the Building.

5.12 The original doorways to the Council Chamber were of classical style and each is pedimented. Four pairs of Ionic order columns⁷ are located at the corners of the Council Chamber. The layout of the Council Chamber is symmetrical with the President's dais and the table for Committee Chairmen right on the centre line. Seats are almost evenly distributed on the two sides of the centre line. A public and press gallery is built at the mezzanine floor level on each side of the Council Chamber and a spiral staircase is installed to provide access to each of them. The Council Chamber projects an image of solemnity and grandeur.

5.13 The President's former seat, having a St. Edwards crown or Queen's crown carving on it, was transferred to the Hong Kong Museum of History after 30 June 1997. The design of the current President's dais is tailor-made for the unique status of the President, with the emblem of HKSAR hung on the wooden panel behind the President's seat.

5.14 The layout of the Ante-Chamber creates a relaxed atmosphere. The neoclassical qualities of the room are preserved by retaining decorations such as cornices with dentils. At the main entrance to the Ante-Chamber is a gong. The gong was originally placed there for decoration purpose. A convention has gradually developed since the 1980s that the gong is given a ceremonial purpose, i.e. a Council officer strikes the gong to invite Members to enter the Council Chamber just before the commencement of a Council meeting.

Prepared by Simon LI
20 May 2003
Tel: 2869 9343

Information notes are compiled for Members and Committees of the Legislative Council. They are not legal or other professional advice and shall not be relied on as such. Information notes are subject to copyright owned by the Legislative Council Commission (the Commission). The Commission permits accurate reproduction of the information notes for non-commercial use in a manner not adversely affecting the Legislative Council, provided that acknowledgement is made stating the Research and Library Services Division of the Legislative Council Secretariat as the source and one copy of the reproduction is sent to the Legislative Council Library.

⁷ Footnote 2 describes the characteristics of Ionic order columns.

Appendix I

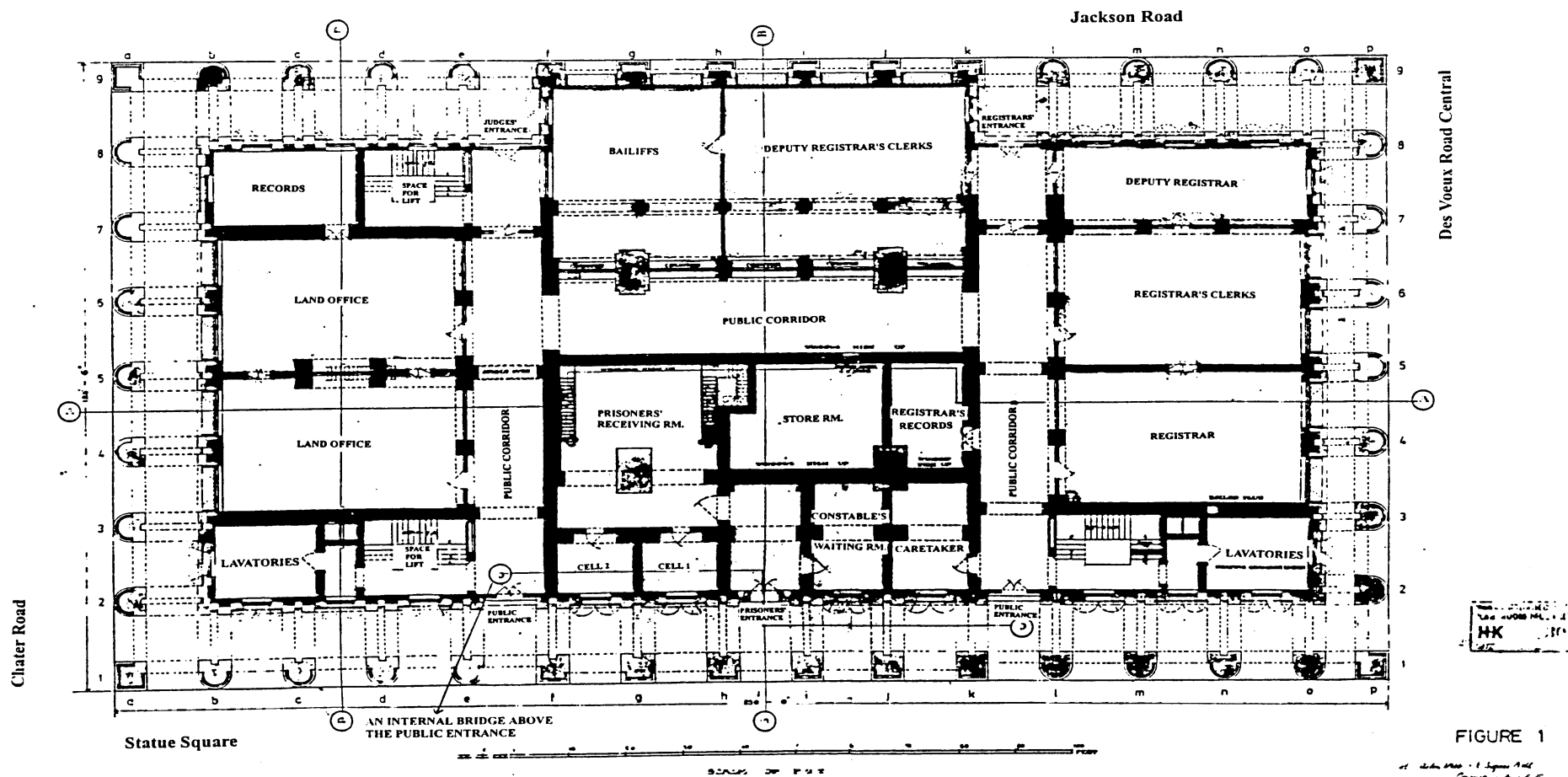
HONG KONG - PROPOSED LAW COURTS ETC.

PLAN OF GROUND FLOOR

ARCHITECTS' DESIGN
GROUND FLOOR PLAN

Drawing reduced from
Architects' design drawing
dated September 1899.

Grid references added



Source: Public Works Department Architectural Office

Appendix II

HONG KONG • PROPOSED LAW COURTS ETC.

PLAN OF FIRST FLOOR

ARCHITECTS' DESIGN :
FIRST FLOOR PLAN

Drawing reduced from
Architects' design drawing
dated September 1899

Grid references added

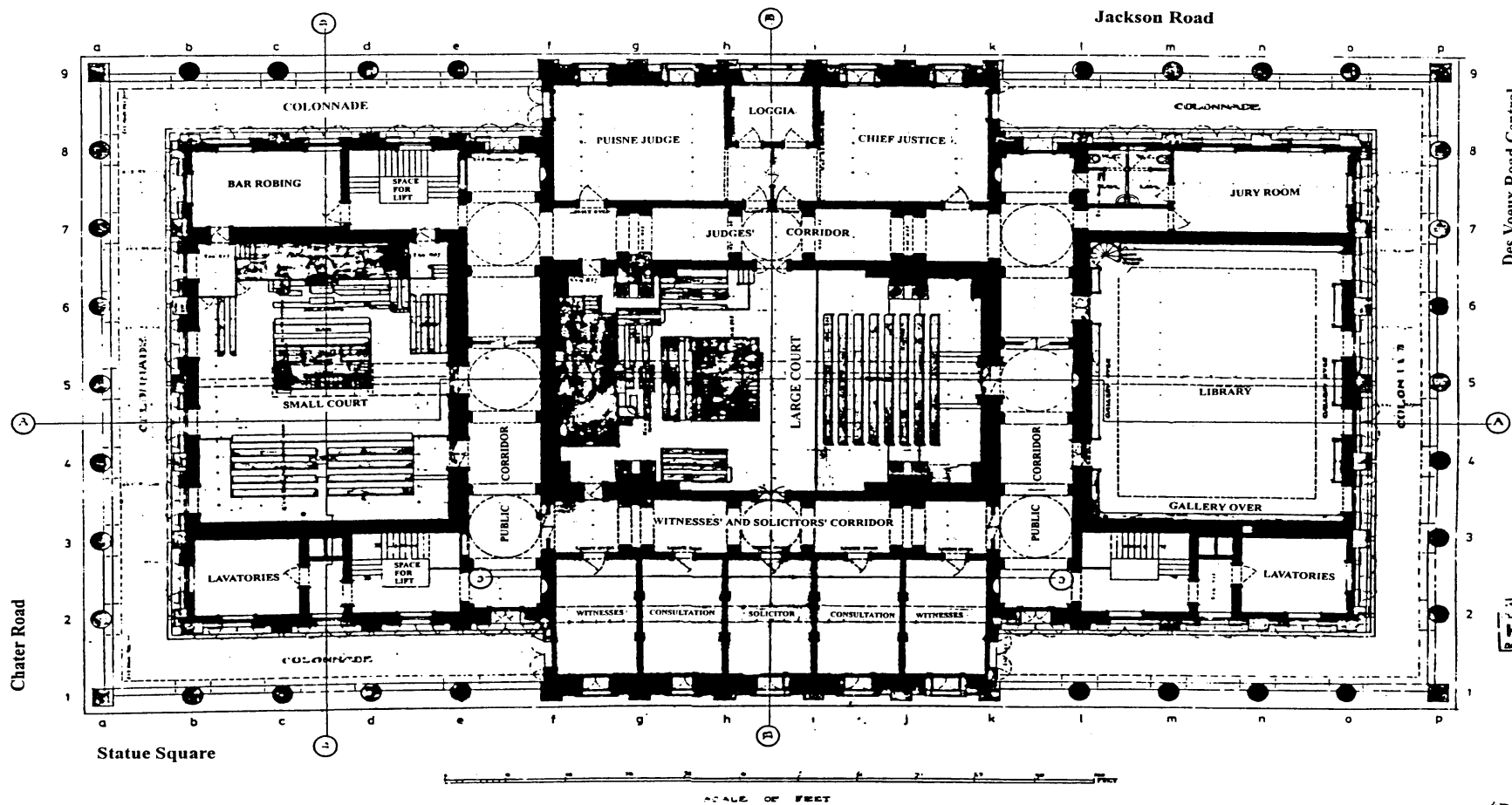


FIGURE 2

Source: Public Works Department Architectural Office

HONG KONG • PROPOSED LAW COURTS ETC.

Appendix III

PLAN OF SECOND FLOOR

ARCHITECTS' DESIGN :
SECOND FLOOR PLAN

Drawing reduced from
Architects' design drawing
dated September 1899

Grid references added

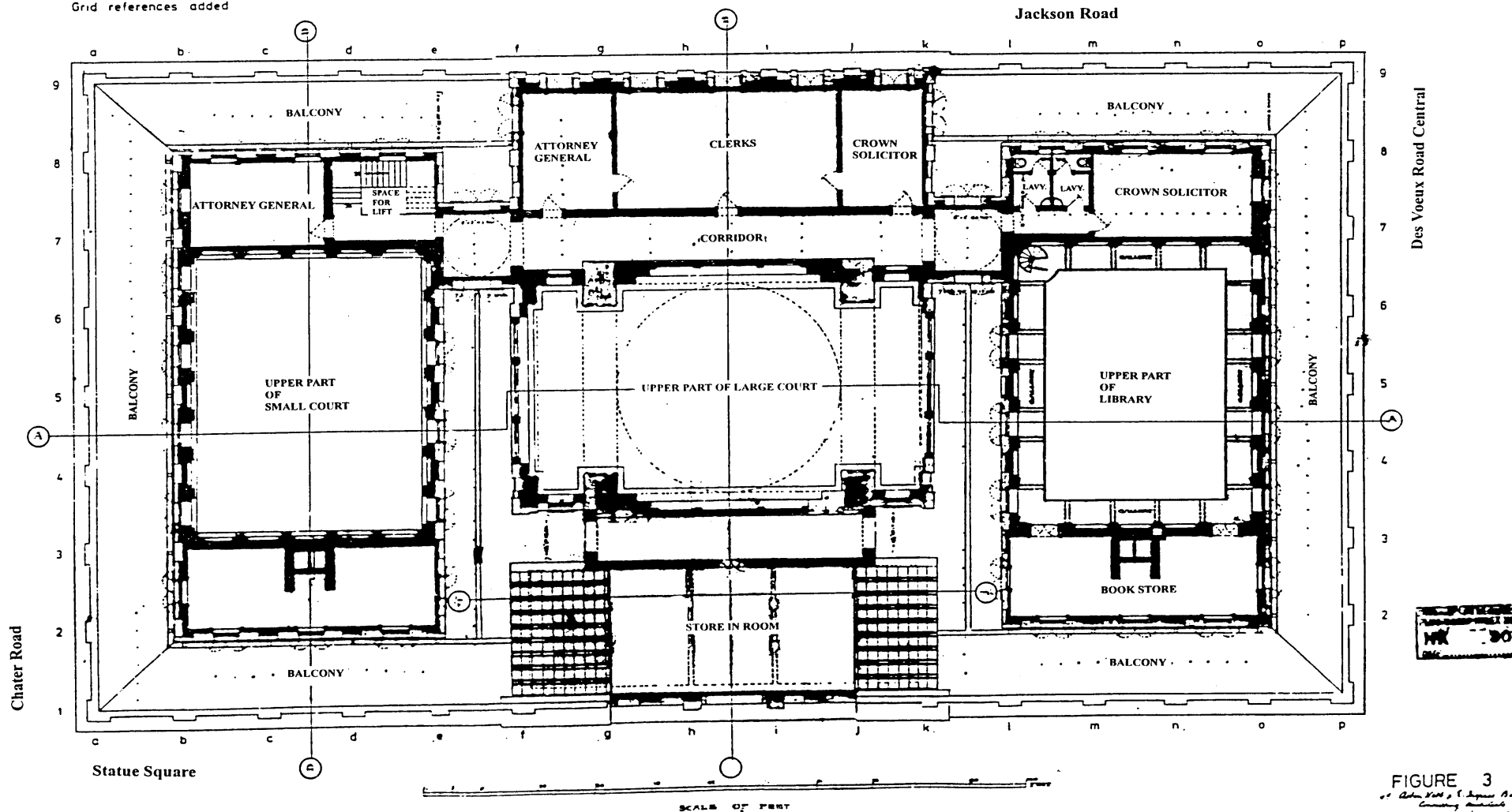
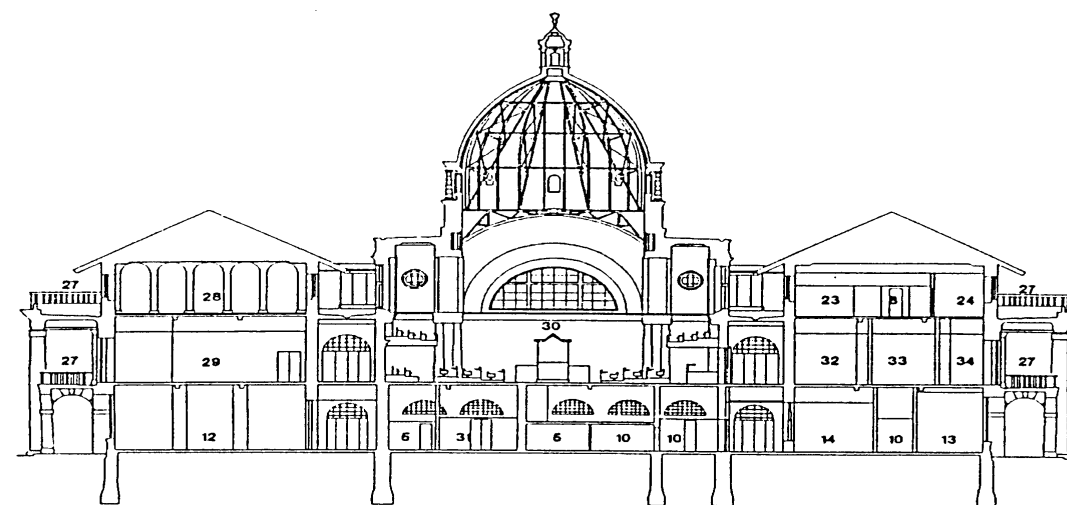


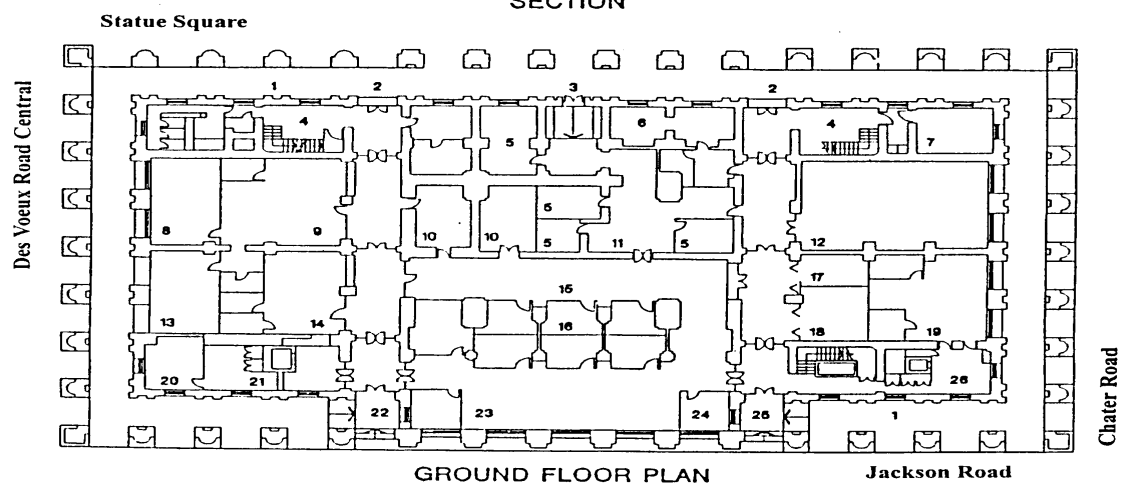
FIGURE 3
of Report of the Architect
General Secretary
of the Public Works Department

Source: Public Works Department Architectural Office

Appendix IV



SECTION



GROUND FLOOR PLAN

- | | | | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 COLONNADE | 11 WAITING AREA | 21 SECURITY OFFICE | 31 COMPLAINTS WAITING |
| 2 PUBLIC ENTRANCE | 12 COMPLAINTS MEETING RM. | 22 VIP ENTRANCE | 32 TV INTERVIEW |
| 3 COMPLAINTS ENTRANCE | 13 PHOTOCOPIING RM. | 23 ADMINISTRATION | 33 PRESS |
| 4 PUBLIC STAIR | 14 R & D / COLLATING / PRINTING | 24 C.A. SECRETARY | 34 HANSARD REPORTER |
| 5 INTERVIEW RM. | 15 COMPLAINTS OFFICE | 25 SERVICE ENTRANCE | |
| 6 TYPING POOL | 16 SA SECRETARIES | 26 SERVERY | |
| 7 GENERATOR RM. | 17 ELECTRICAL SWITCHROOM | 27 TERRACE | |
| 8 GENERAL OFFICE / REGISTRY | 18 TRANSFORMERS RM. | 28 DINING | |
| 9 RECEIPT & DISPATCH / COLLATING | 19 KITCHEN | 29 CONFERENCE ROOM | |
| 10 STORE RM. | 20 BUILDING MANAGER | 30 COUNCIL CHAMBER | |

Source: Architectural Services Department

References

1. Antiquities and Monuments Office. *The Heritage of Hong Kong*. Hong Kong: The Government Printer, 1992.
2. Architectural Services Department. *Architectural Services Department - Hong Kong*. Hong Kong: The Government Printer, n.d.
3. Figures of Justice available at <http://www.supremecourtus.gov/about/figuresofjustice.pdf>.
4. Government Information Services. *Commemorative Booklet for the Opening of the Legislative Council Building Wednesday 30 October 1985*. Hong Kong: The Government Printer, 1985.
5. Government Information Services. *Hong Kong Heritage: Historical Buildings and Antiquities in Hong Kong*. Hong Kong: The Government Printer, 1989.
6. Hong Kong Government. *Administrative Reports for the Year 1912*. Hong Kong: The Government Printer, 1912.
7. Hong Kong Hansard, 1898-1899, 1982-1983 and 1984-1985 sessions.
8. The Law of Hong Kong: CAP. 53 Antiquities and Monuments (Declaration of Monuments and Historical Buildings) (Consolidation) Notice.
9. Origin of Lady of Justice available at <http://www.commonlaw.com/Justice.html>.
10. Records of Legislative Council Secretariat.
11. Royal Coat of Arms available at <http://www.royal.gov.uk>.
12. Scott Wilson Kirkpatrick & Partners in association with Feilden + Mawson *Reinstatement of Supreme Court Building Feasibility Study Volume 1* submitted to Public Works Department Architectural Office in April 1981.
13. Vitruvius Pollio, Marcus. *de Architectura, Book IV* available at http://www.ukans.edu/history/index/europe/ancient_rome/E/Roman/Texts/Vitruvius/4.html.
14. 高添強、唐卓敏編著。《圖片香港日佔時期》香港：三聯書店（香港）有限公司，1995。