

1885.

NEW ZEALAND.

SEACLIFF LUNATIC ASYLUM

(REPORT ON THE, BY THE ASSISTANT ENGINEER-IN-CHIEF).

Laid on the Table, by Permission of the House, by the Hon. Mr. Richardson.

Mr. W. N. BLAIR to the ENGINEER-IN-CHIEF, Wellington.

SIR,—

17th August, 1885.

In accordance with your instructions I have the honour to submit the following report on the alleged defects in the asylum building at Seacliff.

In order that the matter may be more readily understood, I shall consider the various statements made by the Inspector of Asylums seriatim, as they appear in his last annual report.

1. *Laundry.*

“Since my last visit a large number of important improvements have been carried out. A commodious laundry has just been completed, and will no doubt be a success. It is unfortunate however, that a larger steam-boiler and furnace were not provided, which would have been capable of heating all the coppers, for which four separate fires are now necessary. This arrangement was particularly specified in the plan prepared by myself and sanctioned by the Colonial Secretary. I am unaware by whose authority the alteration was made. There are bad workmanship and unsuitable timber in the horses of the drying-closets.”—(Inspector's Report, November, 1884.)

“The laundry is by no means a success, the bulk of the money set apart for its construction having been spent upon architectural effects. A larger steam-boiler here is a matter of necessity, the present one being a mere toy, extravagant of fuel, but incapable of supplying sufficient steam for the drying chamber.”—(Inspector's Report, May, 1885.)

As to the money spent on architectural effects, Mr. Lawson, the architect of the building says that the plan of the laundry is carried out on the exact lines furnished by Dr. Grabham himself. The walls are constructed of plain pressed brick, with Oamaru facings, and the finishing is of the plainest description. Including all fittings and plant, the cost of the laundry has been a little over 7d. per cubic foot, which bears favourable comparison with similar buildings recently erected in Dunedin, as can be seen by reference to the contract schedule. The statement made by the Inspector that the “bulk of the money (£3,000) has been spent on architectural effect” is beyond all reason. The amount so spent in proportion to the total cost of the building is not worth mentioning. The only attempt at ornamentation is in the gables, which are made with “crow-steps,” to correspond with the main building, and it is questionable whether this is not as cheap as laying the stones flat, and dressing them.

With reference to the alteration from the Inspector's plan of heating the coppers in the laundry of which he so strongly disapproves, Mr. Lawson says that the alteration was made because Dr. Neill decided that the steam-coils in the Inspector's plan would be dangerous to patients. Dr. Neill, whom I consulted on the subject, says that he expressed the opinion that steam-coils would be dangerous, but did not give orders for the alteration to be made. It is clear, therefore, that the alteration was made to meet the wishes of Dr. Neill, if not by his express orders; so the matter rests entirely between himself and the Inspector.

I examined the timber in the horses in the drying-room, and found neither bad workmanship nor unsuitable timber. The timber has shrunk very much through the excessive heat; but any timber would do so, no matter how well seasoned beforehand. The horses are not, however, a success for another reason—defective design. They are not stayed or braced in any way, consequently they twist about when moved, and do not work easily. They are made to the design of the asylum authorities, who are, of course, responsible. I may, however, add that, like most of the other “structural defects” in the asylum, these in the drying-horses can be remedied by an expenditure of a few shillings.

As to the steam-boiler, Mr. Lawson, who determined its size, reports the result of the trial as follows: “When we arrived at the building the thermometer was at 80° in the drying-closets, and was raised in twenty minutes to 125°, and up to 132°, and this with indifferent firewood, the pressure of steam in the boiler ranging from 45lb. to 54lb. As 110°, or at the most 120°, is a fair working temperature in the closets, this can be quite easily maintained, and hot water in abundance also supplied from store cistern for all purposes.”