

COURTHOUSE PLAN IS NOW ELEVEN YEARS OLD

BOULEVARD PROPOSAL FOR ROBE STREET

TOWARD the end of this month the Supreme Court will sit in New Plymouth. To members of the legal profession and of the Department of Justice staff this means a repetition of an old problem—the difficulty of finding sufficient space in New Plymouth for the administration of justice.

It may also turn memories back more than 11 years to when the Government decided as part of a rebuilding plan that a civic centre would be built which would include a new courthouse, a block of offices for Government departments, the widening of Robe Street, the closing of Silver Street and the transfer of the Post Office. All this was planned in 1939. Little more has been heard of the plan.

The plan was first mooted on October 29, 1938, when Mr. W. R. Carter, the land purchase officer, called on Mr. F. S. Grayling, then a borough councillor, and said he had been approached by the Public Works Department to have Silver Street closed. He said that the Government had become the purchaser of all the property fronting the street on the western side.

Mr. Carter said that the Government intended to build a new courthouse and, it was anticipated, new Government buildings on the block. In exchange for the land occupied by Silver Street the Government was prepared to give land at the corners of Robe and Powderham Streets and Robe and Devon Streets—to set back those two corners.

There was some negotiation on this. At first the council offered to close both Robe and Silver Streets if the Government would continue Queen Street through to Powderham Street. Later the importance of Robe Street as a possible through route to the Huatoki Valley and also as a means of diverting traffic from Devon Street was stressed.

Meetings between the council and Government representatives continued until finally, in June, 1939, a comprehensive scheme seemed agreed on.

This called for the closing of Silver Street and the widening of Robe Street to a total width of 151 feet. In addition to closing Silver Street, the council was to pay the Government £1500 for the land used in the Robe Street widening.

PARKING AREA.

According to a plan prepared by the city engineer, Mr. R. F. Mainland, a strip 11 feet wide would be laid down the centre of the new Robe Street. This would be planted in lawns and shrubs. On either side of this strip there would be a carriageway, flanked by parking space for from 73 to 90 cars. At the time Mr. Mainland estimated the cost to the council at £2500.

The Government's plan, announced to take place as soon as possible, was the transfer of the Post Office to a new building at the corner of Gill and Currie Streets. A courthouse would be built on the vacated land with the probability of Government offices on such land as was still available.

An even more comprehensive plan was envisaged by the Government town planning officer, Mr. J. W. Mawson. At a meeting of the New Plymouth Town Planning Committee on June 14 he suggested that the widened Robe Street should be continued to Vivian Street. At the head of this wide boulevard would be the municipal buildings, museum and art gallery. This would be sited on rising ground and would dominate the shrub-enhanced street which led up from Devon Street.

Since that time the scheme has received periodic mention, although the only signs of activity on it have been the taking of foundation tests on the site of the new post office.

DIFFICULTIES RENEWED.

Each new Supreme Court session renews the difficulties. The main courtroom is taken for the Supreme Court sitting. As a result there have been occasions when the Magistrate's Court, finding the jury room in use, the Taranaki County Council Chambers not available and the magistrate's room used as the judge's chambers, has been forced to sit in a small office barely large enough for officials and with no room for the public who have a right to be present when justice is dispensed.

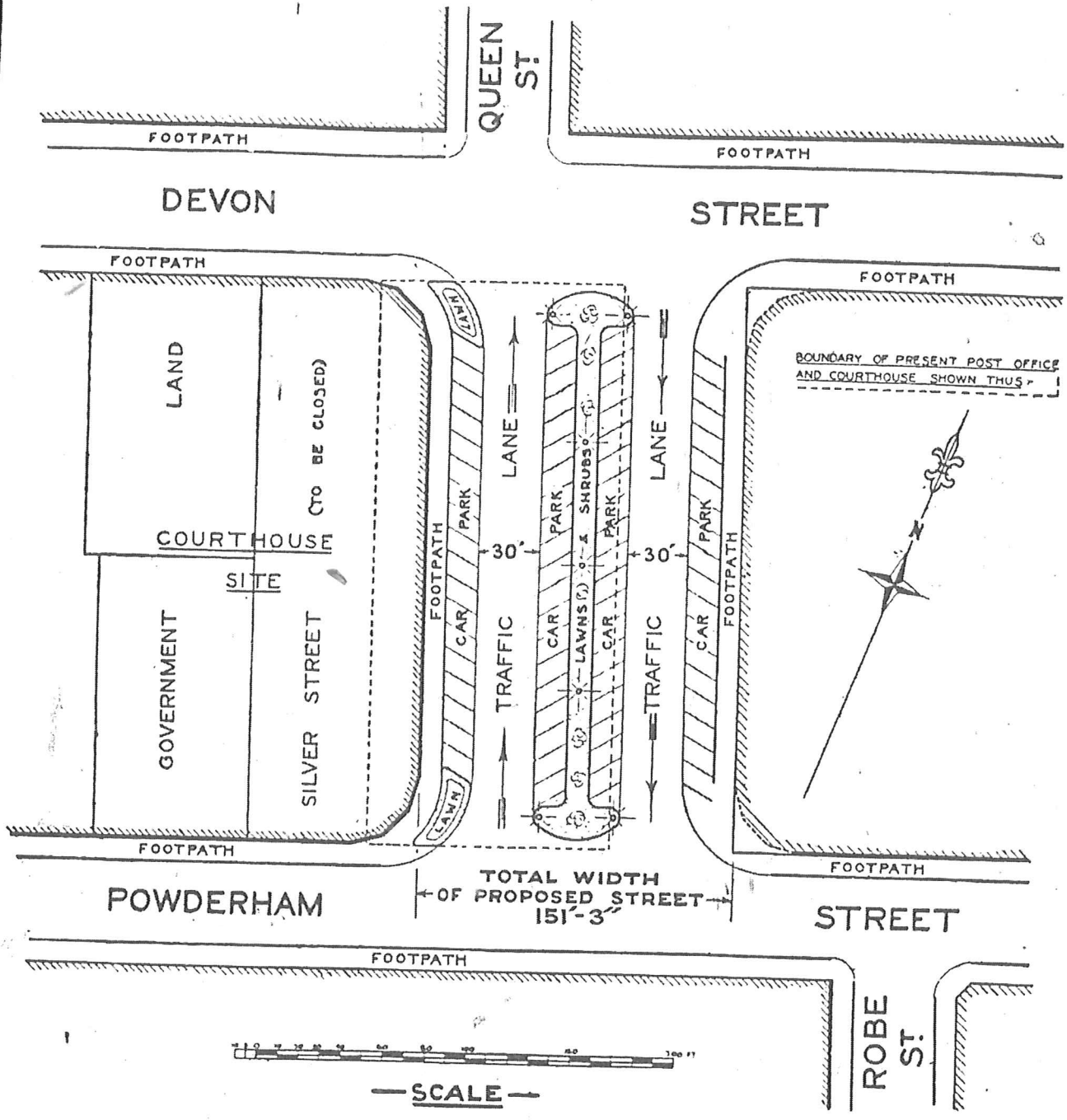
The need for a new courthouse was impressed on the Attorney-General, Mr. Webb, when he visited New Plymouth in February this year. The Minister said that although he recognised that a new courthouse was overdue he could see no likelihood of it becoming a reality for at least three years and possibly five years. He added that he would like to revive in Wellington the question of a new building but it was tied up with the provision of a new Post Office.

The Post Office problem was also discussed on the same day when the present building was inspected by the Postmaster-General, Mr. Broadfoot. Mr. Broadfoot described the building as "ramshackle." The office had been likened to a rabbit warren, he said, but never had he seen so many bolt holes.

Test bores on the site of the new building have continued. The most recent were made in May. Earlier it was stated that the plans for the new office were being re-drawn in Wellington.

Meanwhile a number of minor improvements have been made to the interior of the old courthouse. The view has been expressed that these improvements will serve only to delay further the necessity of providing an entirely new building in accordance with the 11-year-old plan.

sted uc- the
 ation ortly layed titon r the
 nded bail
 d up were that athy ng a rged raffic the Four
 more the two the
 AL
 the ere ally m- ers in- all to n- he



THIS ALMOST-FORGOTTEN PLAN shows a Government proposal which was to have given New Plymouth a new courthouse and a wide boulevard. Prepared by the city engineer, Mr. R. F. Mainland, 11 years ago, it shows how Silver Street was to be closed, Robe Street widened and the site of the present Post Office used for a new courthouse and a block of Government offices.

T.H. 12 August 1950

CC
 E
 TOW
 F
 Depa-
 —the
 admh
 It m-
 than 1
 decided
 a civic
 include
 offices
 widenir
 Silver &
 Office.
 Little n
 The j
 29, 1938
 purchas
 Graylin
 said he
 lic Wor
 Street c
 ment ha
 property
 ern side
 Mr. C
 intende
 it was
 building
 the lan-
 Govern-
 the cor-
 Streets
 set back
 There
 At first
 Robe ar
 ment w
 through
 importar
 through
 also as
 Devon S
 Meetin
 ernment
 finally, I
 scheme
 This c
 Street ar
 to a tota
 to closin
 to pay
 land use