

32 MAXWELL ROAD

A Judicious Balance



Owner:
Ministry of Law

Architect:
Forum Architects Pte Ltd

Engineer:
Ronnie & Koh Consultants Pte Ltd

Contractor:
Incorporated Builders Pte Ltd

Through an intriguing fusion of old and new, the former Customs House building, circa 1932, has been impressively refurbished for its new function as the International Arbitration Centre. The colonial building with its prominent original rotunda and dome roof architecture now faces the future with a revitalized front, a new annex and main entrance at the rear and a new lease of life.



Colonial building with prominent original rotunda and dome roof

Finding The New Order

Substantial archival research was carried out to identify adhoc additions and alterations made to the building. But it was the controlled balance of practicality and aesthetics that makes this project a triumph. Ungainly additions made to the front elevations of the building were removed to restore the façade to the original design. Original steel roof trusses and the prominent rotunda feature of the building were also retained, restored and repaired. Good effort was made to reinstate the windows facing Maxwell Road and Wallich Street to resemble the originals found in archived images. Circular relief mouldings under the third storey windows on all sides of the building add to the good evidence of quality restoration.

Arbitrating a delicate convergence

The project team started with good site planning and design approach as they worked to integrate the old and the new. The outcome is an

interesting juxtaposition of distinctive heritage structure with a contemporary annex that drew inspiration from the originals. The new annex boasts clean lines and slick materials that are easily discernable as modern yet effortlessly integrating with the legacy buildings. It houses a striking new entrance to the building that enhances rather than acts as a distraction. Previously positioned at the rotunda, the building's entrance now creates a grand 'sense of arrival' for the present-day visitors to the

premises. The new link bridge connecting the new to the old has also been cleverly and harmoniously integrated.

Accentuating old spaces

The internal spaces of the building complemented well with the stately heritage. The domed ceiling of the rotunda of the building on the fourth storey was immaculately restored and accentuated with subtle yet inventive lighting effect. Creative design of tight interior spaces allowed the building to retain its low floor-to-floor heights without the claustrophobic feeling. Original ceiling beams were intentionally left exposed and uplit to create the illusion of height and space.

The result is an impressive restoration that has brought a new order and sparkle back to a once faded Neo-Classical charmer.



Iconic rotunda at Maxwell Road and Wallich Street junction



New entrance and drop-off at the rear



Former façade with rhythmic columns and rusticated finish



Circular relief motif below window



Fanlight grille at first storey



Recessed glass link between new and old



Domed ceiling of rotunda accentuated by lighting



Original steel roof trusses



New rear extension ties in with horizontal elements of old building

BUILDING HISTORY

A Staid Presence Through The Years



A Civic Building

Built at a cost of \$313,000 in 1932 by the Public Works Department, the former Customs House (6 June 1932 - 13 August 1989) at Maxwell Road houses the Government Monopolies Department.

In April 1935, the name “Government Monopolies Department” was replaced by the “Excise Department”. The change reflected the decreasing emphasis on revenue derived from the chandu (opium) monopoly and the increasing reliance of the government of the day for its revenue on the duties on tobacco, petroleum and intoxicating liquors.

The name of the Excise Department was changed to that of Department of Customs and Excise in 1938. The building also housed the Film Censor’s Office and Maxwell Road Post Office.

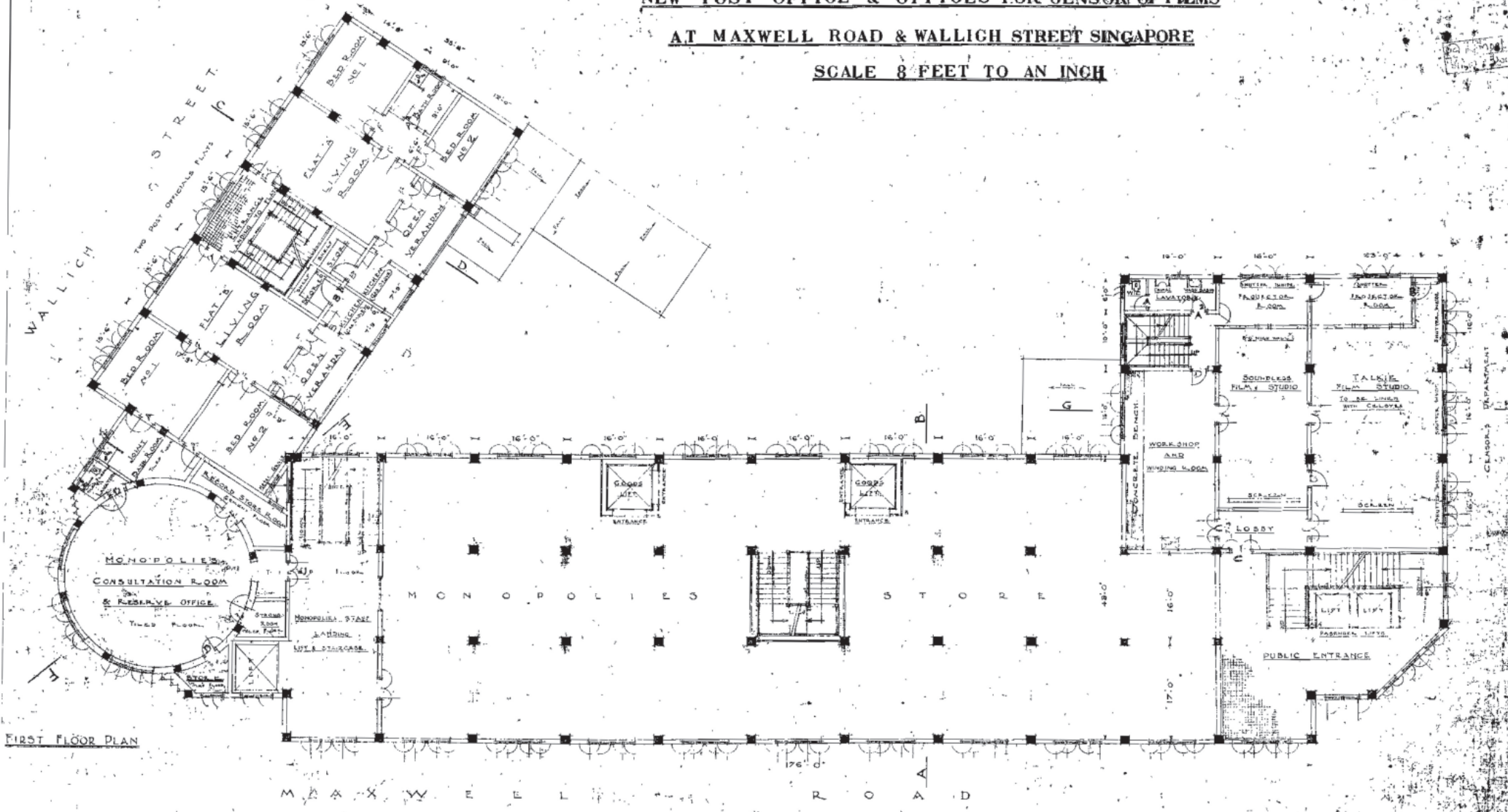
GOVERNMENT MONOPOLIES OFFICES & GODOWNS

SHEET No 2

NEW POST OFFICE & OFFICES FOR CENSOR OF FILMS

AT MAXWELL ROAD & WALLICH STREET SINGAPORE

SCALE 8 FEET TO AN INCH



FIRST FLOOR PLAN

APPROVED (44) A. I. HOOPS
P. C. M. O. S.S.
(44) J. W. DENHART
C. H. L. O. S.S.

APPROVED (44) E. CANTON
SUPERINTENDENT GOVT MONOPOLIES
(44) J. STUTCH BARRY
CONTROLLER OF POST & TELEGRAPHS

APPROVED (44) T. M. HIRSEBY
CENSOR OF FILMS

APPROVED (44) G. STANLEY
COLONIAL SECRETARY

ARCHIVE DRAWINGS

Architectural Floor Plans of Original Customs House

GOVERNMENT MONOPOLIES OFFICES & GODOWNS

NEW POST OFFICE & OFFICES FOR CENSOR OF FILMS

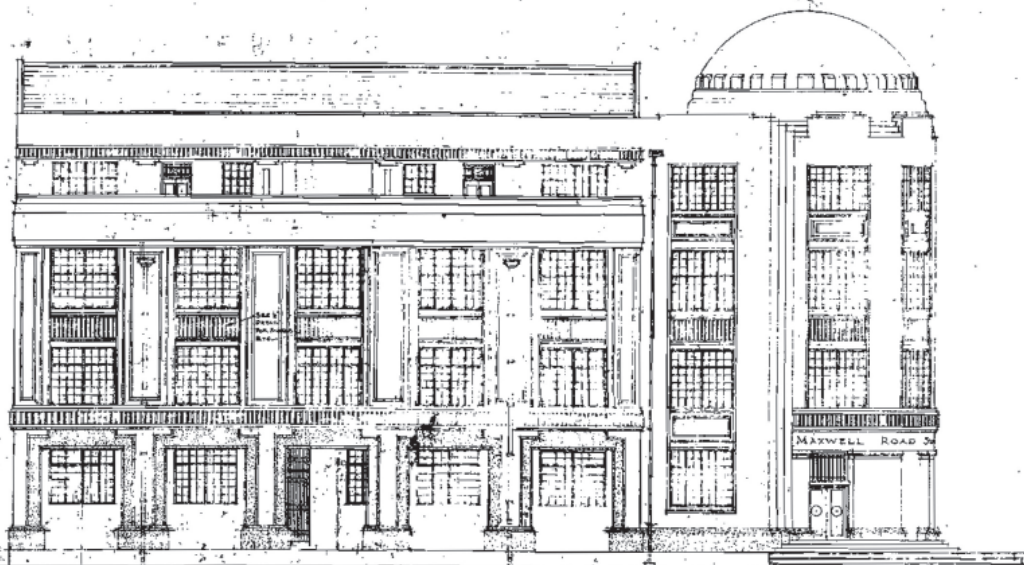
AT MAXWELL ROAD & WALLICH STREET SINGAPORE.

SHEET N^o

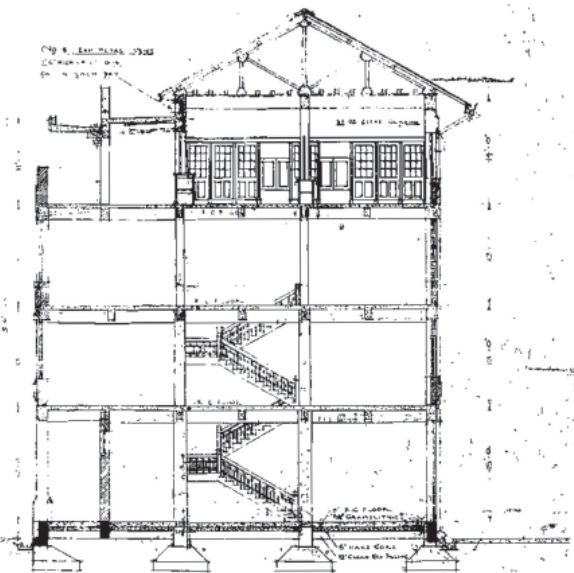
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SHEET 5 of 13

— SCALE 8 FEET TO AN INCH. —



ELEVATION TO WALLICH STREET



SECTION A-B

1:100

Approved
S. W. J. B. & S.
CIVIL ENGINEERS

GOVERNMENT MONOPOLIES OFFICES & GODOWNS

SHEET N^o

NEW POST OFFICE & OFFICES FOR CENSOR OF FILMS

(6)

Q. 11 1904 (6/12)
SHEET 7 of 13

AT MAXWELL ROAD & WALLICH STREET SINGAPORE.

— SCALE — 8 FEET TO AN INCH. —



ELEVATION TO MAXWELL ROAD.

40552
Sd/- G. STEPHENS
CONSULTING ENGINEER
G. Stephens
GOVERNMENT ARCHITECTS

GOVERNMENT MONOPOLIES OFFICES & GODOWNS.

NEW POST OFFICE & OFFICES FOR SENSOR OF FILMS

AT MAXWELL ROAD & WALLICH STREET—SINGAPORE.

SCALE 8 FEET TO AN INCH.

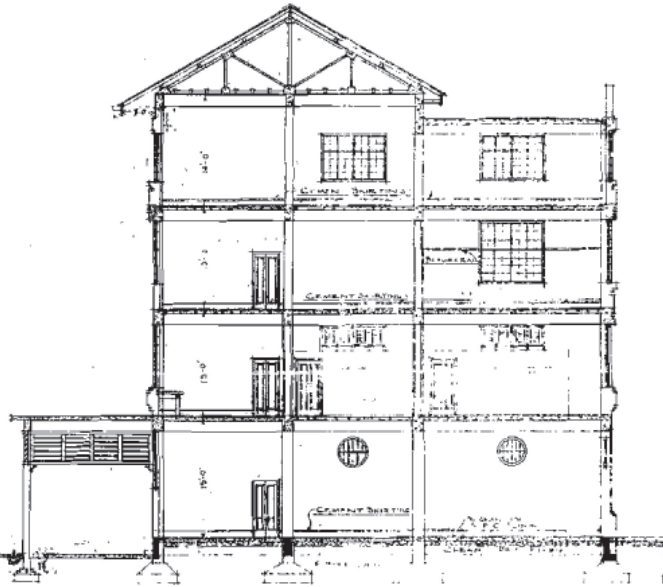
SHEET N^o

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1913
24-250
MAY 16 1913
9 8 13



—ELEVATION TO NEW ROAD—



—SECTION G-H—



—BACK ELEVATION—

NOTE THE DIMENSIONS OF WALLING ABUTTING ONTO THE ROAD TO BE 5'6" BEHIND YARD DRIVING LEVEL.

APPROVED

G. STUBBS O.C.E.
COLONIAL ENGINEER S.S.

G. Stubbins
GOVERNMENT ARCHITECT