

Late in 1936 I was instructed by the Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board to take steps to secure a suitable tenant for the Head Office in Bourke Street, the Board having decided to erect new offices in Little Collins Street. I considered that the building would appeal to the Postmaster-General's Department, and accordingly interviewed the Deputy Director, endeavouring to show to him the advantage it would be to the Post Office to secure a building of that kind immediately opposite the General Post Office. Immediately after that interview I submitted a plan of the building to the District Inspector of the Department, and suggested an inspection. An official of the Department did carry through an inspection, and at his request I wrote Mr. Mackennal, the Works Director of the Department of the Interior, offering to let the whole of the property for £2,300 per annum, or, alternatively, the ground and first floors for £1,600 per annum.

Nothing came of those negotiations.

Early in 1937 I approached the Post Office again. On this occasion, I was informed that they would not rent a place at all; that if they required further accommodation they would re-build in Elizabeth Street. On no account, I was told, would they rent a place. I suggested that they should consider buying the property, as at £20,000 it would be a good investment. The official said that that would not be considered. I then secured an interview with the then Director-General of the Department, Mr. (now Sir Harry) H. P. Brown. About the end of February (the exact dates will be found from my letters, copies of which I do not have here in my home), Mr. Brown wrote me stating that the Department was not in need of additional accommodation beyond that which it had or could readily obtain in buildings the property of the Commonwealth.

All this time other efforts to either sell or let the property were proceeding, and I had communicated with all the leading agents in Melbourne. I do not suppose there was one agent in Melbourne during those and succeeding months who did not try to dispose of the property, but without success. I heard of one firm (Bushell's) being in the market, and after negotiations with the Melbourne Manager went to Sydney to try and bring off a sale at £20,000. The representative here was satisfied that the property would meet their requirements, but at my interview in Sydney it was made plain to me that the firm was not willing to meet our

price, and eventually the Company purchased Russell's building in Flinders Street.

All this time a large board was displayed on the property, intimating that it was for sale or to let. In August, 1937, we submitted it at public auction. No offer was received. At last I was approached by Mr. St. Clair, of Messrs Appleton & Co., who said that he thought he could get a tenant if the rental was satisfactory. He introduced me to Mr. Drysdale Bett, of Radio Times Pty. Mr. Bett was rather difficult to deal with, and I found it quite impossible to pin him down to anything. We would agree on certain points, and he would go away, and everything would look to be settled, but within a few hours he would either be back or would be telephoning raising objections to that which had been agreed to or bringing up fresh points. At last I got thoroughly disgusted and took him to the Chairman (Mr. H. H. Bell), who found him equally unsatisfactory; so much so, indeed, that Mr. Bell decided just immediately prior to his leaving for abroad in April, 1938, that he would have nothing further to do with him. At that stage, Mr. Bett was raising objections to Mr. Bell's offer, £1,000 a year, plus rates and taxes, with an option to purchase at £20,000.

I ought to say that in the meantime I had another interview with the Post Office, in the course of which I again offered the building for sale, or to let at a reduced rental. I was informed that the Post Office would not purchase the building, which, the official said, was old and dilapidated and impossible to re-model; and in any case, it was added, the matter had been taken out of the hands of the Post Office and placed with Mr. Mehaffey, Director-General of Works, at Canberra.

After Mr. Bell went abroad, the negotiations between the Board and Mr. Bett were taken over by the Deputy Chairman (Mr. McGrath), and beyond being present at the first interviews I took no part in them. All that I know is that shortly after the Radio Times had entered into occupancy on the terms suggested by the Chairman, it was arranged by Mr. Mehaffey that the Post Office should take over three floors at a rental of £2,704 per annum, and subsequently the ground floor and basement at £780 per annum, a total of £3,484 per annum, a scandalous sum in view of the rejection by the Post Office of the various offers of the Board.

60 King William Street,
Preston, N 19,
19th October, 1940.

(Signed) J. G. Membrey.