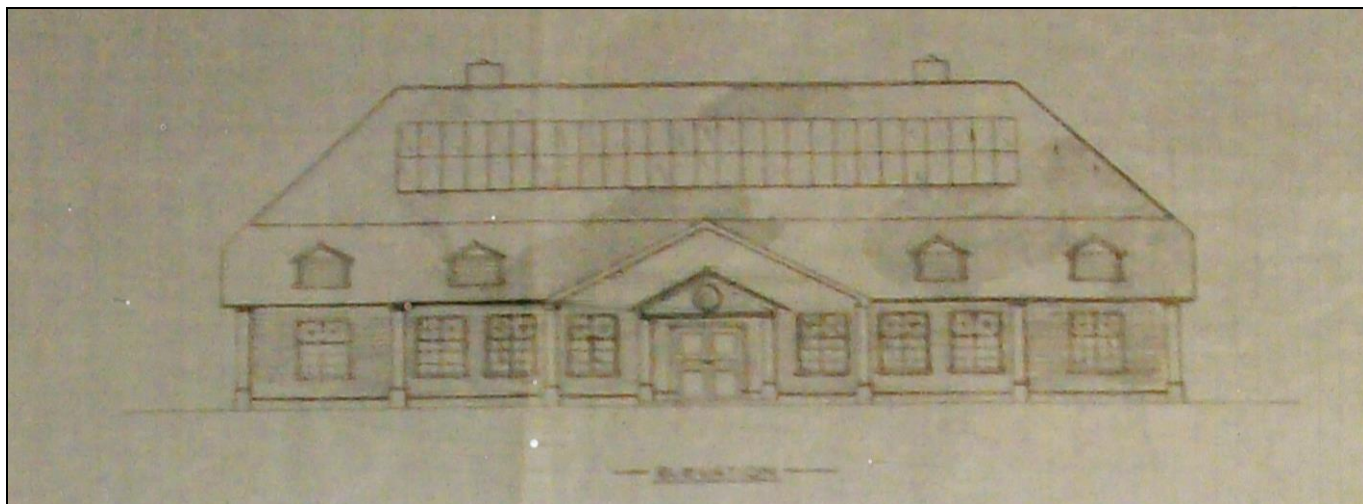


## THE GYMNASIUM AND PUBLIC BATHS

Recognising the need for better sanitation and for facilities for recreation and a brighter social outlook for people materials were purchased during 1929 and shipped to the Falkland Islands for the erection of public baths and a gymnasium. Described as *“an imposing and commodious building situated near the Town Hall”*, the Public Baths and Gymnasium were constructed in 1930 at a cost of £6,000 and opened early in 1931. The building was equipped with six bathrooms, two shower-baths, a reading and waiting room, toilets, caretaker’s office, storerooms and a spacious main hall.



The Colonial Annual Report of 1931 reported that *“the newly constructed Public Baths and Gymnasium have proved themselves immediately to be a most popular institution and have become a central feature of the life of the town.”* Sewerage in Stanley at this time was disposed of partly by water-carriage and partly by earth-closet and many houses did not have adequate bathing facilities. By 1933 there was no longer overcrowding in Stanley and distributing mains were extended so as to serve the whole of Stanley. Eventually there was no longer a need for the public baths part of the building and this part fell into disuse.



Gymnasium from south west, 1930s – photograph Hamilton Collection, JCNA



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Stanley,  
Falkland Islands,  
Friday, 23rd January, 1931.

THE OPENING OF THE PUBLIC BATHS AND  
GYMNASIUM.

Ceremony Performed By His Excellency.

It was fitting that after so much devotion had been paid to the erection of the Public Baths and Gymnasium in Stanley, His Excellency the Governor should, before leaving to take up his new appointment as Governor in Sierra Leone, be able to see the fruition of a scheme so near to his heart, and bequeath such a legacy to the Colony by performing the opening ceremony which took place on Wednesday.

The Hall was well filled with townsfolk while on the platform with His Excellency were the Hon. J.M. Ellis (Colonial Secretary), Mrs. Ellis, the Hon. M.C. Craigie-Halkett (Colonial Treasurer) and Mrs. Halkett, the Hon. G. Roberts (Colonial Engineer) and Mrs. Roberts, Major the Hon. J. Innes Moir and Mrs. Moir and Mrs. Young. The walls were decked with flags and the proceedings were broadcast.

In introducing His Excellency, the Hon. G. Roberts said that before he asked the Governor to open the Baths and Gymnasium he would like to say how very proud he was of the fact that practically the whole of the work was carried out by local labour and in particular, he would like to thank the staff and employees of the Public Works Department for the way in which they had assisted in bringing the building to its present state of perfection. (Loud applause.)

No Colony Can Produce Better Men.

On rising to respond His Excellency was accorded a rousing ovation. He said "Ladies and Gentlemen, It is very nice of you all to come here this morning to the opening of the Public Baths which Mr. Roberts and his workmen have so skillfully built. I wish to join with Mr. Roberts in thanking the men for the really wonderful work they have done and I must congratulate Mr. Roberts on having accomplished successfully this difficult and intricate undertaking.

"It has always been my policy to employ Falkland Island people where possible, and when you walk round these baths you will see for yourselves how well the tiles have been put in, the pipes laid, and the fittings erected. I am sure you will agree with me that no Colony can produce better men to do skilled and difficult work than the Falkland Islands. (Loud and continued applause.)

"You all know how anxiously I have watched the erection of this building. It has been a real pleasure to do something to make your lives happier and easier.

A Bath In Central Queensland.

"I knew from bitter experience what some baths are. The tin one that leaks, the canvas one that lets the water out of the sides when you move an inch. I know the difficulty in hotting up water on a peat fire, and the discomfort of having to wash in the same room you take your meals in, discomfort not only to the washer but to the



- 2 -

Friday, 23rd January, 1931.

eater as well who naturally objects to his soup having a flavour of soap suds. (laughter.)

"I could tell you many stories about baths, but time presses so one must suffice. A certain Public House in Central Queensland had a bath. It was composed of a high wooden frame-work surrounded with sacking. The bather having entered, called out, when water was poured upon him from above. The point of the story is that this duty was performed by the Landlord's children as he had no servants, and as these children were all daughters I can leave you to imagine how embarrassing it was to the bashful members of the masculine gender when they heard a feminine voice asking them if they were ready. (Loud laughter.)

"Do not be frightened, Ladies and Gentlemen, there is no danger of this happening here, as I have implicit confidence in the shower-baths we have erected functioning and performing their duties. (Laughter and applause.)

#### A Boon To The Busy Workman.

"As Major Meir has told us so often baths are essential to the health of a community. There has been an erroneous impression abroad that the people out here are not fond of bathing. But as a matter of fact the Falkland Islands people love washing and are very cleanly. They take to it like a duck does to water. Now they will be able to satisfy their craving for cleanliness without any bother. Just think what it means to the busy workman, who perhaps has been coaling, to come straight away from his work and enter a bath fit for a Roman Emperor, and how his wife will appreciate the labour it would save her. Mothers of families, too, can bring all their infants here at the cost of three-pence each child. Those with a round dozen we shall be prepared to accept at reduced terms, (Laughter.)

"Then when you have washed you will be able to go into that charming room over there which looks over the harbour (indicating the reading room), and spend a happy half hour smoking a cigarette, reading 'Punches' and other papers until you are ready to go.

#### A Thing That Is Worth Doing Is -

"It is no exaggeration to say you cannot get a finer building than this, or one better fitted up. I do so firmly believe if you do a thing at all it is worth doing it well. I am very proud of these baths.

"In a few months this Hall will be fitted up with the latest gymnastic apparatus and the children from the Government School will use it every morning. You will notice the glass roof so that every ray of our precious sunshine will be caught. The general public and Civil Servants will be able to use it in the afternoons and evenings. How they will appreciate having a good bout of single-sticks or fifteen minutes gymnastics and then a shower-bath afterwards, and our footballers, too, what a boon it will be to them.

#### Congratulations To Mr. Roberts.

"In conclusion I hope you will really appreciate how much the Public Works Department have done for you by putting up these baths. The engineers in England said it was a very ambitious scheme and they doubted whether the Gymnasium and Baths could be erected in the Falkland Islands. Well, I had every faith in Mr. Roberts, and in Mr. Roberts' workmen, and now we see the results they have achieved." (Loud applause.)



## GYMNASIUM AND PUBLIC BATHS

VERSION: 9 March 2022

By 1948 a cinema show was being held twice a week, usually on a Saturday and Sunday and the gymnasium was also being used weekly for public dances pending the completion of the new town hall. After completion of the Town Hall the Gymnasium was still popular for dances and in 1954 folk dancing was held in there on a regular basis. In 1970 the Museum was housed in the old public baths.



Despite some public objection the Gymnasium was dismantled in 1994 to make way for the new Standard Chartered Bank building.

