Alexander Matheson told the House of Commons Select Committee on Commercial Relations with China in 1847 that his firm had, without authorisation, commenced building "to a certain extent" before the first Land Sale held by Captain Elliott* on 14 June 1841 in Hong Kong.¹ It is commonly assumed that the site of this building was at what later became known as East Point, in the present Causeway Bay area of Hong Kong, where the firm was to build extensive godowns and residences. One writer, for example, speculates that by the time of those first land sales, Jardine, Matheson & Co. had already selected for themselves a "spacious area at East Point" and intimates that it was there that they were building in June, 1841.² However, even on the rather scanty evidence available, it seems clear that the site of this unauthorised building was not East Point but an area on the present Queen’s Way, in the old Admiralty Dockyard.

Contemporary evidence, in any event, makes it unlikely that East Point was the site. Pottinger, the first Governor of Hong Kong,† gives us a graphic description of East Point as he saw it, possibly in August 1841 but more likely in mid-1842, when he returned from the military expedition against China. He describes its "wild and uncouth state — being one chaos of immense masses of granite and other rocks, that it was hardly accessible by person or on foot, either on the side of the water or the land, that the firm in question, by the application of science and extraordinary labour and by an expenditure of about £100,000 (sic), have not only made it available for their vast mercantile concerns, but have rendered it a credit and an ornament to the colony."³ The site sounds at that time, to put it mildly, somewhat unattractive though it did stand at the head of the Wongneichung Valley and would be well-placed to dominate any settlement there — there is evidence that the firm conceived a plan in 1842 for building a seawall and

* Administrator of Hong Kong January-August 1841 as well as pleni-potentiary for the current negotiations with the Chinese authorities. See p. 16 and Appendix I of G. B. Endacott’s *A History of Hong Kong* (London, Oxford University Press, 1958).

† Sir Henry Pottinger, Administrator and subsequently first Governor of Hong Kong August 1841-May 1844. Endacott *op. cit.* Appx. I.
canal which would give access to warehouses and so on built in the Valley (a plan which A. T. Gordon, the Land Officer, endorsed in the ‘dream’ of the future City of Victoria which he communicated to Pottinger in 1843). But if Pottinger’s description is accurate, it would have taken a good deal of imagination to see it that way.

The East Point site was purchased, at the first Land Sale on 14 June 1841, in the name of Captain William Morgan, a ship’s captain who may have been Jardine’s Hong Kong manager, and the actual area purchased was not specified then or when Pottinger’s Second Land Committee was attempting to settle the Land Question in Hong Kong. We learn, from a later source, that it amounted to almost 170,000 square feet (about 3½ acres). It is, however, often overlooked that the firm also purchased three other marine lots at the same sale: numbers 26, 27 and 28 and it is here that they had already commenced building by the time of the sale. This contention is upheld by a number of contemporary accounts of the sale. The Canton Register (predecessor of the Hong Kong Register) intimates that one purchaser had commenced building before the sale.

We are told in an unpublished history of the early years of Jardine, Matheson & Co. that in February 1841, within a month of the naval forces taking possession of the island, that they had erected a large marshed godown above the foreshore. An anonymous correspondent of the China Mail, writing 8 years after the event, but who attended the first sale in 1841, states that Matheson, in order to avoid the expenses involved in landing goods at Macao for transhipment, resolved to land a consignment of cotton at Hong Kong. To make this possible, he sent from Macao materials for the erection of a godown. This building, he avers, was four feet above the ground at the date of the sale and was sited on what later became known as the Commissariat Stores. The fact that they were building and had ground cleared, he continues, gave additional value to adjoining lots. As will be seen, Marine Lots 26, 27 and 28 were shortly to become the Commissariat stores. If further support is needed, I may quote from Tarrant’s History of Hong Kong, published in 1861 or 1862: he states that “some months before the sale…….Messrs Jardine, Matheson & Co. erected those godowns which now form part of the Naval Yard, near the Canton Bazaar.”
Enough has been said to demonstrate that East Point was not the Firm's first building site. This leads on to a further contention — that it was not the original intention to site the main part of the new city of Victoria in the Happy Valley — though it is undeniable that that idea was mooted within a year or so and building did commence there after a very small number of individuals, most of them connected with Jardine, Matheson & Co., very quickly obtained grants of much of the best land in the area. However, one further circumstance suggests that the firm originally intended to have their Headquarters much nearer the centre of town than was later the case. Sometime in 1841, perhaps very soon after the sale of 14 June 1841, they obtained a transfer from a Captain Ramsay of what was then Town Lot 42, and there erected a large house of which the Canton Press caustically commented that "on entering the harbour, you perceive the most commanding site, disfigured by a hybrid erection, half New South Wales and half native production, which is a foretaste of the architectural absurdities to be perpetrated on this island." But Jardine, Matheson & Co. were unfortunate in their choice of this site for their headquarters on two counts. It was early decided that the hill to the west of the present Albany nullah (Garden Road) should be reserved for Government buildings only — Government correspondence was as early as November 1841 datelined 'Government Hill' — thereby restricting the development of the town in that direction into the fairly wide and gently sloping valley behind the present Murray House. But even worse was the Military's insistence that the ridge and hillside to the east of the Albany nullah should be reserved for their use: this area covered the sites of both the firm's godowns and house. The house later became the residence of Lord Saltoun, Commander of British Forces in China during the war which ended with the Treaty of Nanking in 1842. The present Flagstaff or Headquarters House, built by 1846, now stands on this site.

They were able to occupy neither building for long: early in 1842, Colonel Malcolm, Pottinger's secretary, wrote to them, extending an offer to compensate them for moving away to allow the area to be used by the Military. They would be allowed to choose marine lots in any part of the island not appropriated for any other purpose and would, in addition, be given $25,000 in cash for the buildings they had erected. They had, of course, no option, and
chose two lots to the west, which were designated at the time 72 and 73.\textsuperscript{12} It was at this time, however, that the firm definitely moved out to East Point and, immediately on the transaction regarding their property being settled, they proceeded to erect what became their main godowns at East Point.\textsuperscript{13} The firm had already acquired property in the area of East Point, Wongneichung and Sookunpoo, if only because no-one else seemed interested at the time and it was there cheaply for the asking. In October 1841, they instructed Morgan to obtain a grant of the hill behind East Point, which he immediately did\textsuperscript{14} and a little later obtained permission from Pottinger to purchase from its Chinese proprietors the slope on the east side of this hill.\textsuperscript{15} They also purchased from a merchant named Leighton a town lot on which he had built a godown\textsuperscript{16} and a suburban lot which he had prepared for building. Captain Morgan also secured a town lot on which a bazaar was built (Jardine’s Bazaar — not to be confused with Morgan’s Bazaar near the barracks), and in addition he built a house on Caroline’s Hill for himself which was known for a few years as Captain Morgan’s Bungalow.

Like most of the other large mercantile houses, Jardine, Matheson & Co. did not move their headquarters to Hong Kong from Macao until 1844.\textsuperscript{17} As shown above, there is ample evidence that East Point was not their first choice for the new headquarters, though the facility with which they were able to secure large areas of land at East Point may well have dictated a move even if the circumstances which I have described had not come about.

Hong Kong, 1968

DAFYDD EMRYS EVANS

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NOTES

1 Minutes of Evidence, Q. 2260.


3 Pottinger to Lord Stanley, (No. 15 of 1844), 28 February 1844, (CO129/5/f.174) The occasion of this despatch was Admiral Cochrane's suggestion that East Point would make the best site for a naval depot and that Jardine, Matheson & Co. should be removed to make way: see Cochrane to Pottinger, 23 February 1844 (CO129/5/f.182).

4 Gordon to Malcolm, 6 July 1843 (CO129/2/f.138).

5 See Friend of China, 2 November 1850.

6 Canton Register, 29 June 1841.


8 China Mail, 20 December 1849.

9 Apparently published in 1861 or early 1862 in either Canton or Hong Kong. It was a reprint of articles written by Tarrant in his newspaper, the Friend of China, at the time when he was publishing it in Canton. For this extract, see Friend of China, 9 November 1861.

10 Canton Press, 19 February 1842.

11 See Hong Kong Register, 15 January 1850. The siting is amply demonstrated from maps also. And see Minute by Pottinger on the question of accommodation for General D'Aguilar, Saltoun's successor: 22 January 1844 (CO129/5/f.93).


13 See Hong Kong Register, 15 January 1850.

14 Yorke, op. cit., p. 488.


16 The firm claimed later that this godown belonged to their Bombay agent, Sir Jamsticke Jeejeebhoy, without whose consent they were unable to comply with a request that it be sold to the military for use as barracks: see Pottinger to Saltoun, 26 October 1843 (CO129/5/f.524).

17 Yorke, op. cit., p. 491.