M.R.O. 14—13,000—27-9-24.

MADRAS RECORD OFFICE.

Government of Madras.

Revenue **DEPARTMENT.**

G.O. No. 1989 Press ~~Misc.~~

172-173

Dated 8-8-~~19~~1866

Not to be folded or roughly handled

Proceedings of the Madras Government, Revenue Department, 8th August 1866.

No. 172. Read the following Proceedings of the Board of Revenue, dated 30th July 1866, No. 5,222 :—

Read the following letter from the Collector of Nellore, to the Acting Secretary to the Board of Revenue, dated 21st June 1866, No. 189.

1. I have the honor to request the orders of the Board, with reference to the shell pits in the villages of Irakam, Venad, and along the south-western shores of the Pulicat lake.

2. In 1864, the late Cumili Narayanaswami Mudaliar brought to my notice that our salt revenue was seriously affected by these shell quarries, which formed a series of salt beds as the lake dried every year.

3. Early in 1865, the Deputy Collector reported* in detail on the pits in question. He also forwarded a sketch† of the locality and the position of the pits, which I herewith forward for the inspection of the Board; and asking him to call on the Contractors to fill up the pits, and apply to me for orders should they refuse, I myself applied to the Collector of Madras to know whether the Contractors were bound, by the terms of their agreement, to fill up the pits as supposed by the Deputy Collector, and asked at the same time to be furnished with a copy of the Muchilka.

* No. 17, dated 12th January 1865.
† Requested to be returned.

4. From the Muchilka‡ I found that what the Deputy Collector supposed as to liability was correct, and that Lieutenant-Colonel H. W. Hitchins, R. E., was the Contractor.

‡ Received with letter, No. 179, dated 25th March 1865, from the Collector of Madras.

5. I thereon addressed the Superintending Engineer, Fourth Division, and inquired what steps could be taken by his Department to have the terms of the contract carried out, the contract having been made, I presumed, by Colonel Hitchins in his official capacity.

6. In reply, Colonel Boileau with his letter of the 9th August last, No. 1,317, forwarded two letters, one from Captain Wood, R. E., the other from a person who signs himself P. J. Somoo Chetty. Captain Wood styles this latter individual "the Contractor." It is reported that the said Contractor has received instructions to fill up the pits, and Captain Wood suggests that the inspection of the quarries be delayed till "the Contractor has reported they have been filled up."

7. In October, the Acting Deputy Collector in charge of the Salt Department, Mr. Freer, adopted a different course, and reported that no progress had been made in filling up the pits. I, therefore, again addressed the Superintending Engineer, Fourth Division, and in reply, I have received from him, under date the 7th instant, No. 461, copy of a Report, dated 2nd ultimo, from the Executive Engineer, Presidency, Northern Range.

8. From this report, copy of which is enclosed, it appears that Somoo Chetty has no intention whatever of filling up the pits, and that to attempt to fill them up would, in the opinion of Captain Goddard, R. E., "be madness."

9. Captain Goddard, on inspection, found the pits to extend over thousands of acres, and considers that they "are no doubt numbered by millions," of which all are not Somoo Chetty's, only "some thousands," which it is added Somoo Chetty plainly told him he was not going to fill up.

10. Captains Wood and Goddard severally talking of Somoo Chetty as Contractor, and the instructions he has received, and the intentions he has expressed, do not further refer to the contract question, or the liability of the department under the terms of the original contract.

11. And the latter Officer, after discussing the question in a fiscal point of view, observes that Somoo Chetty has been much to blame, and the remedy lies with the Revenue Department.

12. It is unquestionably correct that, using the pits under consideration as pans, salt could be grown very cheaply; but there is, however, a charge for carriage when salt is so obtained, that would entirely swallow up the saving in other respects.

13. And without entering now in the question of whether it would be cheaper to guard the pits or fill them up, and in the former case, to which department the cost of guarding should be debited, I would at present suggest that inquiries should be made as to how far the agreement entered into by Somoo Chetty is a counterpart of the agreement entered into by Colonel Hitchins. Should Somoo Chetty have bound himself to fill up the pits, it seems to me he should be compelled to adhere to the terms of his contract. The Sriharikota villages having only been recently transferred to this District, I cannot explain why the question of filling up the pits has not been brought forward before, but that it was not, scarce seems good cause for refusing to proceed now; and whether it rests with us or Somoo Chetty to prove how many thousand pits he is responsible for, that to some extent there will be good evidence to go on is what may be anticipated, and would, I think, be to the advantage of the public service to act on. Future Contractors would be clear as to what was the intention of Government in the matter.

14. I will call on Mr. Bates to explain why no reply was sent to Captain Goddard's letter of the 21st April. I regret to find such inattention should have been shown, but think it was probably the result of the change which took place just about that time in the office.

Enclosure No. 1.

From the Executive Engineer, Presidency, Northern Range, to the Superintending Engineer, Fourth Division, dated 2nd May 1866, No. 10.

1. In obedience to your Order, No. 4,985, dated 19th April 1866, I have the honor to report that I have inspected the shell pits on the Pulicat lake.

2. The shell is collected in the vicinity of two villages, one named Soonapoo Goonta, and the other Yellavooroo.

3. The pits at the first-named village are not worthy of notice. There are only some half dozen of them, and the space occupied is about the size of the Band prominade.

4. The pits at the second-named village extend, I should say, over thousands of acres, and are no doubt numbered by millions. They are not all Somoo Chetty's. Some thousands no doubt are his.

5. Our Shell Contractor, Somoo Chetty, had evidently set a man to scratch about the half dozen pits at Soonapoo Goonta (the landing place, and a mile distant from the main shell ground), by way of a blind, just before my arrival.

6. I beg here, once and for all, to remark that neither Somoo Chetty, nor any one else, have given the most remote practical evidence of their serious intention of filling up the pits. Somoo Chetty plainly told me as much, as that he was not going to do it.

7. Somoo Chetty knows nothing about what has been going on, and cares nothing so long as he secures his money from me regularly. He never saw the pits until I took him there.

8. His Gumastah, from whom I had hoped to obtain information, unfortunately did his best to baffle me, and told me one or two unmitigated lies. He said that the shell pits were unapproachable, but fortunately I found the pits quite accessible, and fully convinced myself on all points which I desired to become acquainted with.

9. Each pit is, say, six deep and forty feet in circumference, and they are as close together as they can be. The shell is found about four feet below the surface, and lies in beds about two feet thick.

10. The pits are worked by petty contract villagers, who excavate shell at so much a garce, and again, boat-owners contract to convey shell at so much from the pits to Madras. The excavators, after having exhausted one pit of its shell, leave it unfilled, with the soil excavated heaped all round its edges, and go off and work a fresh pit. As already stated, our Contractor has never troubled himself to look after the matter, in spite of my reiterated warnings, and he evidently has no intention, as he plainly states, of departing from his present line of conduct.

11. The Deputy Collector visited the place in October it seems, and no one has been there since. In October, the whole place is under water, and nothing to be seen I am told. I asked this functionary to meet me at the shell pits, but he did not do so, nor have I up to this date received any reply to my letter written to him on the 21st April 1866.

12. The Salt Department have allowed the evil complained of by them to go on increasing for years without attempting any practical check, and now when it is absolutely, in my opinion, quite past any practical remedy, the Superintendent at Soonapoo Goonta informs me that it is required to fill up and level all the shell ground.

13. It would simply be madness to think of levelling the whole of the pits. No one can produce authentic evidence as to who dug the various pits, or when they were dug, so I am told. I am told there is no map of them; but then I have only the Superintendent's word (a two-years-in-office man), and no higher authority. The advantages of filling up the pits is very easily computed, I think, in a general way. The injury accruing, owing to the existence of the pits, was thus represented by the Superintendent. When the water in the lake retires, the old shell pits become practically salt pans, and people help themselves to the detriment of the revenue. I pointed out that, upon the occasion of our visit, there was no salt in the old pits, when the Superintendent stated that he had already collected and stored it. Under these circumstances, I don't see how there can be *much loss*. A few extra watchmen would prevent illicit collections of salt, and surely the salt revenue, so accruing over thousands of acres, would pay for the watchmen, and leave a margin for profit. Again, looking at the matter in another light, suppose twelve watchmen, at Rupees 5 per mensem, per man, to be employed, this will be per annum Rupees 720, or say, represent a capital of Rupees 15,000. Now, I do not hesitate to say that to fill up and level all the shell ground extending over thousands of acres, would cost lacs and lacs of Rupees, and the work would extend over years, as we are debarred working during the monsoon, and for some weeks after it, when the lake water is high. I cannot attempt to frame even an approximate estimate of the actual cost of the works. To do so, I should require to encamp at the spot, and fill and level an acre or two in different parts of the whole area to obtain data; and even then, my estimate would only be very approximate.

14. I think that, in future, shell should be quarried on system, if there can be no practical objection shown. Thus, let a trench twelve feet wide and six feet deep be opened right across the area to be worked from side to side, and the shell removed, after which the operation should be repeated, immediately in rear of the trench, and the material excavated from the second trench, together with the excavated earth from the first, should be employed to fill up the first trench, and so on. I do not recommend the trench to be *bona-fide* filled up, as this would be too costly a proceeding. If the excavators have thus to fill up with earth brought from a distance, it will raise the price of chunam fearfully; but a straight trench, such as I recommend, could be easily watched,

and would form a capital, cheap, permanent, salt pan. The salt would be collected cheaper in it, than in the regular pans; because, instead of having to lift the water into it by labor, it could be filled without expense from the lake, below whose surface it lies, or again the trench would make an excellent channel for salt boats and shell boats if desired.

15. Under the present system of quarrying shell promiscuously, an immense lot of ground is left unworked.

16. To sum up. There has been no attempt made, nor is any contemplated (as he fairly states,) by Somoo Chetty to fill up and level his shell ground. He has grossly neglected the whole affair, and is very much to blame. If he had chosen to visit the spot, he might, no doubt, have in a single day come to some arrangement for filling up the pits. As it is, the Gumastah, who does not care what happens, has had everything his own way at the pits, and Somoo Chetty is quite content to let things jog on as they do, as he has a large profit, no doubt, by his transactions in chunam with me. The remedy (suggested by me above) lies with the Revenue Department.

No. 461.

Copy forwarded to the Collector of Nellore, with reference to his letter, No. 262, dated 26th October 1865.

MADRAS,
7th June 1866.

(Signed) J. GODDARD, Captain, R. E.,
Officiating Superintending Engineer, 4th Division.

(True Copy.)

(Signed) J. W. B. DYKES,
Collector.

ENCLOSURE No. 2.—Plan.

1. Ordered that the foregoing letter be submitted for the consideration and orders of Government.

2. The whole question in connection with the shell quarries at Irakam and Venad, and along the south-western shores of the Pulicat lake, raised by the Collector of Nellore, depends on the terms of the contract entered into by the Public Works Department with Somoo Chetty, who is stated by that Department to be the real Contractor.

3. The Board suggest that an inquiry be made, and information required on the following points:—

I. As to the contract itself, and the circumstances under which it was made with Colonel Hitchins, especially as to the condition requiring the filling up of the pits.

II. Whether this condition is expressly included in the contract entered into with Somoo Chetty.

III. The date of the contract, if the above condition is included, and whether right of action is barred at all by lapse of time.

IV. If the condition is not included, who is to blame for the omission, and what means there may be of proceeding against the offending party.

4. If Somoo Chetty is bound, by the conditions of his contract, to fill up the pits excavated by him, it is idle for him to say that he won't and can't so fill them up. It appears to the Board that action should be taken, provided right of action does lie, to compel him to fulfil the conditions of his contract. It is important that

the revenue should be protected, and pits of the nature described must certainly seriously affect the revenue.

5. The Collector of Nellore should have submitted the Muchilka referred to in paragraph 4, and the correspondence quoted in his letter.

No. 173. ORDER THEREON, 8th August 1866, No. 1,989.

Miscellaneous.

The Board will make the inquiries they suggest, procuring a copy of the contract bond from the Superintending Engineer.

(True Extract.)

(Signed) J. D. SIM,
Secretary to Government.

To the Board of Revenue.

Exd. T. Cartledge.

MEMORANDUM,

Immediate

Requested for reference the undermentioned ~~papers on the subject of~~

Plan shewing the locality & position of the well pits in the Pulicat lake in the Nellore District forwarded with Dr no 3 30th July 186. No 5222.

REVENUE BOARD OFFICE,

13 Sept 186

To

The Registrar of Land Revenue

Registrar.

9th 1989. The

The Rt will make the
enquiries they requested,
procuring a copy of
the Contract bond &
the Let & Engr.

I D L

8th August 66.

10 Copies Letts Nos Revd Dec 8th