

Kom Tong Hall
at 7 Castle Road, Mid-levels, Hong Kong

Brief History

THE LIFE OF HO KOM-TONG AND KOM TONG HALL

Built in 1914, Kom Tong Hall (甘棠第) was named after its first owner, Ho Kom-tong (何甘棠). Ho Kom-tong (1866 – 1950), alias Ho Kai-tong (何啓棠), otherwise known as Ho Tai-sang (何棣生), was a younger brother of Sir Robert Ho Tung (何東). He was a prominent businessman, community leader and philanthropist. He received his early education at the Central School (now Queen's College), and was a schoolmate of Dr Sun Yat-sen, the founder of the first republican government in China. Starting his commercial career at the age of 20, Ho's first occupation was a compradore of the Jardine, Matheson & Co., Ltd., Hong Kong. Ho was successful and his business expanded throughout China and Southeast Asia, and he was one of the founders of the Chinese Commercial Union (later the Chinese General Chamber of Commerce).

2. After the 1894–1904 plague in Hong Kong, Ho established the Kau-U-Fong Public Dispensary in 1906 to safeguard the health of the Chinese populace. When a smallpox epidemic broke out in Hong Kong towards the end of 1908, Ho successfully sought official permission to allow the disease to be healed by Chinese medical practitioners, who were better trusted by the native population.

3. The disastrous typhoon in 1906 caused heavy losses of life and property and the fisher folk who lived in the sea suffered immensely. Ho with the aid of the Hong Kong Government raised \$1.8 million in a short time. A remainder of \$630,000 of the relief fund was used for the construction of the Yaumatei Typhoon Shelter.

4. In 1908, when the Guangdong Province suffered from flooding, Ho contributed \$50,000 and held a Relief Fund Bazaar, raising another \$400,000 for the relief work. When the flood came again in 1910, Ho contributed \$50,000 and made an appeal to the Hong Kong Government to pursue relief, raising \$400,000. Aside from the necessary sum for relief, the remainder was used to build dykes and embankments to prevent further misfortune.

5. Ho was Chairman of the Tung Wah Hospital Board of Directors in 1906. As the local population proliferated, Ho realized the need of another public hospital besides the Tung Wah Hospital. With the aid of his colleagues, he founded the Kwong Wah Hospital as the first hospital on the Kowloon Peninsula. In 1915, Ho organized the St. John Ambulance Brigade in Hong Kong. In 1928, when members increased to a number of 300 and expenditures became too big, Ho suggested that Endowment Fund should be subscribed from the public to maintain the organization.

6. Ho was one of the founding members of the Aberdeen Chinese Permanent Cemetery and the Confucian Society in Hong Kong. He was a Justice of Peace in Hong Kong, and was conferred the Order of St. John of Jerusalem by the St. John Ambulance Brigade, England, in 1924. He was further conferred the Officer of the Most Excellent

Order of the British Empire (OBE) by King George V in 1928.

7. Ho was also the possessor of several Chinese decorations. By President Yuan Shih-kai, he was honoured with the Order of Chia Ho (Excellent Crop), Third Class; the Second Class of the same Order was given by President Fung Kwok-chang; while the Second Class of the Order came to him from President Hsu Shih-chang. The Red Cross Society of China honoured him with a Medal.

8. In his private life, Ho was known for his romantic affairs and big family. He had a dozen or more concubines and over 30 children, and of course it is hard to know all of them. However, it is worthy of note that Bruce Lee, a celebrated international *Kung-fu* movie star and master, is the son of Grace Ho, one of Ho's daughters.

9. Since early childhood Ho Kom-tong had been fond of Chinese Opera and he was well acquainted with many opera singers. He occasionally organized opera performances in Kom Tong Hall. According to oral accounts, the opera music from the building was heard all around the neighbourhood and caused great disturbance to the local residents.

10. When the Japanese invaded Hong Kong in 1941, Kom Tong Hall was used by the British Air Raid Precaution Association as an emergency station. The Japanese had attempted to occupy the building but did not succeed. Soon after the Japanese took over Hong Kong, horse racing was resumed and for some time Ho was coerced to run for the presidency of the Hong Kong Race Club.

KOM TONG HALL IN THE POST-WAR PERIOD

11. Ho Kom-tong passed away in 1950. Kom Tong Hall remained the residence of his descendants until 1959, when a rich merchant surnamed Cheng purchased the building and in the next year sold it to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, commonly known as the Mormons. The former common room of the building was converted into a chapel, and the lower basement became a place for baptism.

12. Until the mid 1980s, the building has fulfilled the Church's needs as a chapel, an administrative office, a genealogical centre and a religious education institute as well. In 2004, the government acquired Kom Tong Hall from the Church for HK\$53M for converting the building into Dr. Sun Yat-sen Museum. The museum was open to the public in 2006.

Architecture

13. Kom Tong Hall is a large stately mansion house built in the Composite Classical style popular in the Edwardian Colonial Period in Hong Kong combining red brickwork with stucco or stone work architectural features, similar in design to the Old Pathological Institute in Caine Road (1906) and Central Police Station, Hollywood Road (1919). The Composite Classical style borrows architectural features and details from the four Classical Orders: Corinthian, Ionic, Doric and Tuscan. Baroque, Rococo and Art Nouveau decorative features can also be found both internally and externally.

Main Elevation

14. The architectural composition of the façade of the main elevation which faces north comprises a central curved bay with open colonnaded verandahs at second and third floor levels set above rusticated stucco-work to the ground floor and basement levels. The central bay is flanked on either side by red brick wings with stucco or stone dressings. The whole façade is topped by an entablature comprising a frieze, dentil mouldings, cornice, parapet wall and central panel decorated with a cartouche and swag in Baroque style. Two pavilions at roof level situated over the side wings complete the architectural composition.

15. Architectural features on the main façade include Corinthian capitals to columns, keystones over arched windows, balconettes to third floor windows with ornamental metalwork balustrades, and apron panels below ground floor windows each decorated with a cartouche and swag in Rococo style. Windows and doors are fitted with external louvered shutters or jalousies all constructed in hardwood.

West Elevation

16. The west elevation facing Castle Road is made up of a complicated composition comprising a carved entrance bay with splayed wing, and a projecting rectangular bay with a splayed corner. The main entrance is set in curved rusticated stonework with curved granite steps, flanked by rusticated pilasters, with stepped voussoirs forming a flat arch with a keystone inscribed *Kom Tong Dei* in Chinese characters and a Baroque cartouche inscribed “1914” over the keystone. The upper storeys are built in red brickwork with stucco or stone quoins, and architraves around window and door openings. Architectural features include ornamental ironwork balustraded balconies to upper storey windows, keystones or moulded hoods over windows, decorative panels and plaques, and a classical entablature. All hardwood windows, doors and shutters appear to be original.

Internal Features

17. Internally the main rooms and corridors of the ground floor and first floor are lavishly fitted out with lacquered rich dark hardwood wainscoting. Fluted square and rectangular wood columns with Corinthian and Doric features flank the corridors, and a grand staircase with ornamental balustrading serves the building from basement to the second floor. The ceilings of the main rooms and corridors are ornately decorated with moulded cornices and plaster panels highlighted in gold leaf. Colourful stained glass windows in Art Nouvean patterns of the period are situated to illuminate the main staircase and in other prominent positions where they could be seen and admired by visitors to the house.

18. Classical architectural details and features in Baroque and Rococo styles abound in the house including dentil mouldings, egg-and-dart mouldings, swags, wreaths, festoons, tassels, acanthus leaves, fluting and beading. Of particular interest are the ornamental ironwork balustrades to the balconies with designs composed of trefoils, scrolls, and curvilinear foliage in Rococo style around a central intertwined monogram “HO”, the name of the original family who built the house.

22. The servants' quarters are situated on a mezzanine floor served by a simple rear staircase from the basement where original wall and floor tiling still exists. The roof is also served by this rear staircase and features two corner pavilions or gazebos built to resemble Greek or Roman temples, and a colonnade of columns in the Doric or Tuscan Classical Orders.



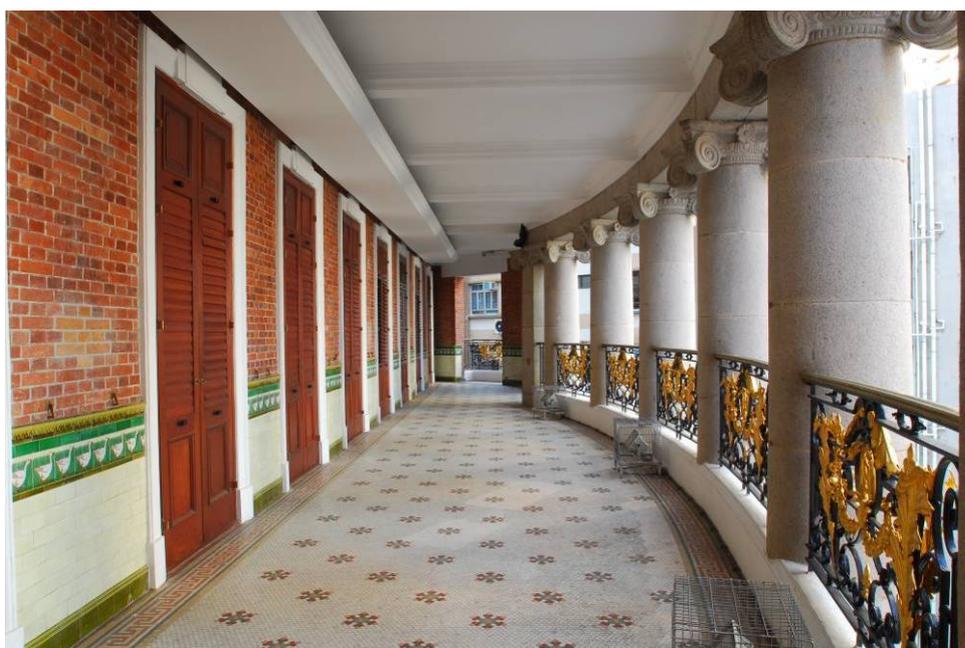
The front elevation of Kom Tong Hall facing Caine Road



The French Parlour on the upper ground floor of Kom Tong Hall



The original teak wood staircase with the stained glass window in the background



The veranda, wall tiles and railings are all preserved intact.