

Historic Building Appraisal
Holy Family Chapel
Chek Keng, Tai Po, New Territories

The Holy Family Chapel (聖家小堂) in Chek Keng (赤徑) was under the charge of the Italian Missionary Society. It was built in 1874 to replace an earlier chapel that had been seriously damaged by a storm in 1867. The whole village was finally converted into Catholics. Most of the newborn babies were baptized and had their Confirmation when they were in their teens. *Historical Interest*

The Chapel was politically important as a guerrilla base of the famous Hong Kong-Kowloon Independent Battalion of East River Guerrilla (東江縱隊港九獨立大隊) during the period of Japanese Occupation (1841-1945). When the Japanese invaded Hong Kong, two groups of soldiers from the Guangdong People's Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Force (廣東人民抗日游擊總隊) crossed the boundary and stationed at Wu Kau Tang (烏蛟騰) and Sai Kung respectively.

The Chapel consists of three components: a chapel, quarters for priests, and an abandoned school named Ming Sun School (銘新學校) which probably already existed in the mid-1920s. The Chapel acted as the mission centre for the Tai Long District (大浪堂區); but since 1980 its leading position was replaced by the Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish (聖母無玷之心堂區) in Tai Po. Priests served the villagers of Chek Keng twice a year until 1989. Since then, the Chapel was turned into a youth camp, and is now left vacant.

The chapel is a simple single-storey pitched roof building with a two-storey section in the middle housing the priest's quarter. The two bays at the east end were the former Ming Sun School. The main hall of the chapel has white painted rendered walls, arched windows, arched cross walls internally, and a decorative altar at one end opposite the main entrance. The floor is cement screeded, the walls are white-washed and all seats or pews removed. A doorway at one side of the altar leads into the priest's quarter and sacristy which are reached by wooden stairs. The school annex at the end appears to be semi-derelict and covered with vegetation. An additional structure providing kitchen and lavatory accommodation has been built on at this end. Architectural features are virtually non-existent, apart from the arched windows and cross-walls and the moulded cornice at eaves level. The architectural style is difficult to determine, but it is similar to **Spanish Mission** style. *Architectural Merit*

There are other mission churches of similar design in the New Territories so this one is not particularly rare, but it has built heritage value. Part of the roof has been replaced by corrugated steel sheeting and some windows have been replaced by modern aluminum units. Fortunately the altar aedicule has *Rarity, Built Heritage Value & Authenticity*

been preserved.

The Chapel marks the endeavours of Catholic missionaries and their influence on village development in Tai Po from the 19th century to the early 20th century. The social value to the community lay in the role the chapel played in the religious lives of the converts. Since the 1970s, the villagers of Chek Keng have either emigrated abroad or moved out to the urban area. With the decline of the village however it is now only of interest to historians and weekend visitors using the MacLehose Trail.

***Social Value
& Local
Interest***

The chapel has group value with the nearby traditional Chinese buildings, such as Po Tin Study Hall (寶田家塾), Tin Shui Lau Fong (天水流芳) and many green-brick village houses still preserved in Chek Keng.

Group Value

The chapel was converted into a youth camp in 1989, but this does not seem to have been successful because the chapel is now left vacant. Adaptive re-use would depend a lot on the revitalization or redevelopment of the village.

***Adaptive
Re-use***