

**Heritage Appraisal of Façade of the Old Mental Hospital
High Street, Sai Ying Pun, Hong Kong**

Completed in 1892, the Old Mental Hospital (舊精神病院) at No. 2 High Street (referred to as “the Building” hereafter) was originally designed and constructed as Medical Staff Quarters of the Government Civil Hospital (國家醫院人員住所) to house the Assistant Superintendent, Government Analyst and Apothecary and European nurses. Accommodation consisted of ten bedrooms, five sitting rooms, an office and a dining room with servants’ quarters, bath and lavatory. The site was chosen because of its isolation and quietness away from the noisy thoroughfare of Queen’s Road on which the temporary quarters in the Government Civil Hospital abutted, which was considered good for the health of the medical staff. A contract for construction works was signed in November 1889. The Building was completed and occupied in June 1892.

***Historical
Interest***

In 1906, an extension was constructed to the east end of the original building to accommodate additional nurses (i.e. by extending eastwards up High Street). The extension comprised a dining room, a sitting room, six bedrooms, three bathrooms, a box room, pantry and four rooms for servants. It was faced with granite dressings carefully designed to match the classical style of the original adjoining façade. In 1908 another two-storey extension, comprising four bedrooms and two bathrooms, was further added to the east end to accommodate additional staff from the Hong Kong Nursing Institute after the Institute was taken over by the Government. The Building remained as the Medical Staff Quarters of the Government Civil Hospital until 1939.

Prior to the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937, many mentally-ill Chinese patients were transferred from Hong Kong to the John Kerr Refuge for the Insane (惠愛醫院) in Guangzhou for treatment as the Chinese Lunatic Asylum (華人精神病院) at No. 45 Eastern Street (opposite the Building), which was originally expected to give temporary accommodation to patients waiting for transfer to Guangzhou, had a limited capacity. However, the transfer ceased

with the occupation of Guangzhou by the Japanese in October 1938. Chinese patients then had to be kept in very overcrowded condition in the Mental Hospital¹. To relieve the overcrowding, the Government endorsed the conversion of the Building into the wards for the mentally-ill female patients in 1938. Conversion works commenced in March 1939 and were completed in August in the same year. Being the additional wards of the Mental Hospital in its vicinity, the Building on High Street became known as the Mental Hospital as well.

Later in 1939, the Japanese Military Authorities, according to the Hong Kong Administration Report for that year, permitted the transfer of Chinese patients to Guangzhou and the overcrowding of the Mental Hospital was further relieved. However, there is no accurate record of the use of the Building during the Japanese Occupation (1941-1945).

The transfer of Chinese patients to Guangzhou was terminated in 1949. Moreover, with the increasing demands for local psychiatric service, it was necessary for the provision of a new, large purpose-built institution. Therefore, the Castle Peak Hospital was constructed. It was officially opened by Sir Robert Black, the then Governor of Hong Kong, in 1961.

In 1961, the Building was converted into an out-patient clinic for the mentally-ill (日間精神科門診部) and provided some limited day hospital accommodation; it was used for this purpose until its vacation in 1971. From 1971 until 1998, the Building was left vacant. In 1998, works commenced to redevelop the site into the Sai Ying Pun Community Complex (西營盤社區綜合大樓), with the exceptional granite façade of the Building preserved intact.

The existing façade of the Building is L-shaped in plan, and comprises a wide verandah along the long side facing High Street, and its short side elevation facing Eastern Street. The heavy

***Architectural
Merit***

¹ According to the Hong Kong Government Gazette, the Chinese Lunatic Asylum on Eastern Street and the European Lunatic Asylum next to it (now demolished) were united in 1906 and renamed as Mental Hospital in 1929.

Early-Baroque features, including wide arched verandah and lower level of rusticated granite blocks together create an appearance of strength and impregnability, which would have been a valuable asset for a new hospital (it is estimated that the façade alone cost nearly two-thirds of the total expenditure for the Building). The fine dressed ashlar mouldings, cornices, quoins and band courses provide an elegant contrast to the heavy rusticated granite blocks. Further graceful effects are achieved by the use of pediments, pinnacles, decorative parapets and ornamental wrought-ironwork balustrading to the verandahs.

The granite façade remains authentic, although of course the inside face of the façade has been modified to ‘tie in’ with the new structure of the Sai Ying Pun Community Complex behind. The later extensions at the east end in 1906 and 1908 were deliberately designed to blend into the original adjoining façade.

Authenticity

Serving as a mental hospital from 1939 to 1961 and then as an out-patient clinic for the mentally-ill from 1961 to 1971, the façade of the Building is one of the oldest surviving structures testifying the development of mental care services in Hong Kong. This style of monumental Early-Baroque architecture is also rare in Hong Kong, particularly as it is so accurately constructed, using local materials.

Rarity

Having served as a mental hospital from 1939 to 1961, the Building has been locally known as the “Old Mental Hospital” (舊精神病院) and has continued to be a well-known and recognized landmark in Western District, as well as a popular historical feature on the Central and Western Heritage Trail. It is also affectionately known as the “High Street Haunted House” (高街鬼屋) and has been featured in films such as “The Supernormal” (大迷信) (1992) and “Triad Underworld” (江湖) (2004). Although the preservation of the façade may be criticized for being an example of “façadism”, it also demonstrates a successful and valuable practical compromise, by retaining the most important character-defining elements of the original construction, and preserving an historic landmark that blends well with the urban streetscape.

***Social Value
& Local
Interest***

The façade of the Building provides an attractive architectural and historic grouping with the Old Chinese Lunatic Asylum (舊華人精神病院) which is located at Eastern Street (Grade 2) (currently the Eastern Street Methadone Clinic). The low-rise construction of the façade harmonises very well with the character of the low-medium rise buildings along High Street. It also remains as a key element in the historic Sai Ying Pun hospital ensemble, which extends along Hospital Road, Eastern Street and High Street. The façade is also within walking distance to the Old Upper Levels Police Station (舊半山區警署) on No. 1F High Street (Grade 3) (currently David Trench Rehabilitation Centre), No. 4 Hospital Road (Grade 2), CCC Hop Yat Church (Hong Kong Church) (中華基督教會合一堂香港堂) at No.2 Bonham Road (Grade 1) and the Old Pathological Institute (舊病理學院) at No. 2 Caine Lane (declared monument).

Group Value