

**MEMORANDUM FOR THE
ANTIQUITIES ADVISORY BOARD**

DECLARATION OF THREE HISTORIC BUILDINGS AS MONUMENTS

PURPOSE

To seek Members' advice on the proposal to declare the following three historic buildings as monuments under section 3(1) of the Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance (the "Ordinance") (Cap. 53):

- (a) Signal Tower (訊號塔) at Blackhead Point, Tsim Sha Tsui;
- (b) Race Course Fire Memorial (馬場先難友紀念碑) at So Kon Po; and
- (c) Façade of the Old Mental Hospital (舊精神病院立面) on High Street, Sai Ying Pun.

HERITAGE VALUE

Signal Tower in Tsim Sha Tsui

2. The Signal Tower in the Signal Hill Garden at Blackhead Point was built in 1907 by the Hong Kong Observatory to house a time-ball apparatus that was previously located in the nearby Round House of the Former Marine Police Headquarters. The Signal Tower was one of the two buildings constructed in Hong Kong for the purpose of signalling accurate time to the mariners and the public. The time-ball service resumed at the Signal Tower on 8 January 1908 and ceased on 30 June 1933. In 1980, the Signal Hill Garden was opened to the public and the retired Signal Tower became a landmark feature of the Garden.

3. The Signal Tower was originally 42 feet high with three storeys, and a storey of about 20 feet was added in 1927 to enhance the Signal Tower's visibility. It was built to a heavy Classical Baroque design incorporating popular Edwardian decorative features of the time, which combined red brickwork with contrasting lighter colour stone architectural features. It is also

a square-shaped building with elegant chamfered corners, as compared to the usual square corners. The brickwork is in “English Bond” of specially made red bricks, while the stonework is of carved local granite. Architectural features include granite plinth, band course, moulded cornices and windows with “Gibbs surrounds”.

Race Course Fire Memorial at So Kon Po

4. The Race Course Fire Memorial (the Memorial) (馬場先難友紀念碑) was erected in 1922 to pay respect to those who died in the tragic Race Course Fire which broke out on 26 February 1918 (the second day of the annual “Derby Day” races) at the Racecourse (跑馬地馬場). The Memorial, which is situated on the hillside above the present Hong Kong Stadium at So Kon Po (掃桿埔), is the only memorial in Hong Kong dedicated to the victims who died in this disastrous fire.

5. Construction of the Memorial was led by Tong Yat-chuen (唐溢川), the then Chairman of the Tung Wah Hospital. It demonstrated the generous and immediate response to such a major disaster relief project from both the public, Tung Wah Hospital and the Government in contributing their resources to taking care of the dead, injured and the affected families.

6. The Memorial comprises two Pavilions on the topmost terrace, then the central Memorial Arch on the next lower terrace and finally a pair of Pagodas built on the lowest terrace. Each terrace is paved with granite slabs and includes balustraded parapets and is connected by flights of granite steps. The high front retaining granite wall which supports the lowest terrace is curved in the traditional shape of a Chinese grave. The whole composition shows great architectural talent in cleverly combining both Western classical as well as traditional Chinese architectural elements.

Façade of the Old Mental Hospital in Sai Ying Pun

7. Completed in 1892, the Old Mental Hospital at 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). Extension was carried out in 1906 and 1908 to accommodate additional nurses. To relieve the overcrowding of the Mental Hospital at No. 45 Eastern Street (currently the Eastern Street Methadone Clinic), the Building was converted into wards for the mentally-ill female patients in 1939. Being the additional wards of the Mental Hospital which was located at Eastern Street from 1939 to 1961, the Building on High Street became known as the Mental Hospital as well.

8. With the increasing demands for local psychiatric service, the Castle Peak Hospital was constructed and officially opened in 1961; and the Building was converted into an out-patient clinic for the mentally-ill (日間精神科門診部) in the same year and 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. Serving as a mental hospital from 1939 to 1961 and then an out-patient clinic for the mentally-ill from 1961 to 1971, the Building has been locally known as the “Old Mental Hospital” (舊精神病院), and the façade is one of the oldest surviving structures testifying the development of the mental care services in Hong Kong.

9. 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 Early-Baroque features, including wide arched verandah and lower level of rusticated granite blocks, together create an appearance of strength and impregnability. This style of early-Baroque architecture is also rare in Hong Kong, particularly as it is so accurately constructed, using local materials.

10. The Signal Tower and Façade of the Old Mental Hospital are located on government lands and currently managed by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department and the Home Affairs Department respectively. Race Course Fire Memorial is situated on a private lot owned by the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals. Heritage appraisals and photographs of the three historic buildings are at **Annexes A to F** respectively.

GRADING AND DECLARATION

11. In recognition of the heritage value of the three historic buildings, the Antiquities Advisory Board (AAB) accorded Grade 1 status to Signal Tower and the Façade of the Old Mental Hospital on 18 December 2009, and Race Course Fire Memorial on 21 December 2010 respectively in the assessment exercise of the list of 1,444 historic buildings.

12. At its meeting on 26 November 2008, the AAB endorsed the establishment of a formal relationship between the statutory monument declaration system and the administrative grading system for historic buildings. Under the endorsed arrangements, Grade 1 buildings, defined as “building of outstanding merit, which every effort should be made to preserve if possible”, will serve as a pool of highly valuable heritage buildings for consideration by the Antiquities Authority (i.e. Secretary for Development) as to whether some of these may have reached the “high threshold” of monuments for statutory protection under the Ordinance.

13. The Antiquities and Monuments Office (AMO) considers that with the significant heritage values as explained in paragraphs 2 to 9 above, all the three historic buildings have reached the “high threshold” to be declared as monuments for permanent protection under the Ordinance. Consent to declare the three historic buildings as monuments has been obtained from the respective owner and management departments.

ADVICE SOUGHT

14. In accordance with section 3(1) of the Ordinance, the Antiquities Authority (i.e. Secretary for Development) may, after consultation with the AAB and with the approval of the Chief Executive, by notice in the Gazette, declare any historic building to be a monument. Members’ advice on whether the three historic buildings should be declared as monuments under section 3(1) of the Ordinance is therefore sought. The intended monument boundaries of the declaration are shown in **Annex G**.

NEXT STEP

15. If Members support the proposal to declare the three historic buildings as monuments, the AMO will take this forward in accordance with the provisions of the Ordinance.

Antiquities and Monuments Office
Leisure and Cultural Services Department
June 2015

Ref: LCSD/CS/AMO 22-3/0