

Heritage Appraisal of Block 10, Old Lei Yue Mun Barracks Lei Yue Mun, Chai Wan, Hong Kong

Old Lei Yue Mun Barracks (the “Barracks”) was one of the earliest and most important British Army fortifications in Hong Kong. The name was taken from the fishing village of Lei Yue Mun¹ (鯉魚門), the “Gateway of the Carp”, which lies on the mainland side of the narrow strait below Devil’s Peak. The Barracks was divided into three parts – the central area (main barracks), the western ridge (upper fort) and the headland (lower fort). The main barracks, built at different times from 1890 to 1939, mainly served as offices and married quarters for the British Army.

***Historical
Interest***

Situated at the northeast corner of Hong Kong Island overlooking the eastern approach to the Victoria Harbour, Lei Yue Mun occupied a strategic position. Before the establishment of the Barracks in the late nineteenth century, the British military had in 1844 built barracks at the nearby Sai Wan² (西灣) to the south of the channel.³ Due to prevalent diseases such as malaria and dysentery which killed a sizable number of British soldiers and civilians, the barracks was later abandoned.⁴ In 1885, the military switched their attention to construction of a permanent infrastructure at Lei Yue Mun. This was probably attributed to the possible attacks from Russia and France to the colony. As war fears increased, the then Hong Kong Governor Sir George Ferguson Bowen was compelled to fund the construction of a fort at Lei Yue Mun Pass. In addition, other military installations, including a redoubt, barracks and a series of tunnels were built in the subsequent years, which altogether formed the Barracks. By the 1890s, the fortifications at Lei Yue Mun had fully become an important point of coastal defence.

In the following three decades, the military installations at the Barracks continued to expand in size and number, including the erection of a number of new blocks in the central area. By the 1930s, however, the strategic importance of Lei Yue Mun declined considerably as a result of technological and tactical advances which had prompted the establishment of new defence positions in the territory.

¹ The place name of "Lei Yue Mun", in its old usage, includes "Lyemun", "Lyeemun", "Lyemoon" and "Lyeemoon".

² The place name of "Sai Wan" was also called "Saiwan" and "Sywan".

³ Bard, Solomon M. *Notes on the History of Hong Kong's Coastal Defences during the British Administration, with Special Reference to Lei Yue Mun*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Museum of Coastal Defence, 2015: 37.

⁴ Ko, Tim Keung & Wordie, Jason. *Ruins of Wars: a Guide to Hong Kong's Battlefields and Wartime Sites*. Hong Kong: Joint Publishing (HK) Co. Ltd., 1996: 75.

During the Japanese Occupation, the Barracks fell into the hands of the Japanese. On 8 December 1941, the Japanese launched their attacks in Hong Kong. After the fall of the New Territories and Kowloon, the British Forces immediately strengthened the defences at Lei Yue Mun to prevent the Japanese from crossing the Lei Yue Mun Channel from Devil's Peak. On 19 December 1941, the Barracks fell despite the fact that it was defended by various units, including a company of the Royal Rifles of Canada, the 5/7 Rajputs and the 6th Battery of the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps.

In the post-war period, the Barracks was used by the British Army as a training ground until 1987. During the first half of the 1950s, the upper fort was occupied by a troop of air defence artillery. From 1948 to 1984, the Barracks housed the Depot and Record Office of the Hong Kong Military Service Corps. In 1987, the Army relinquished the Barracks to the Hong Kong Government and the site was then converted to civil use. The central area and the western ridge have become the Lei Yue Mun Park and Holiday Village since 1988, whereas the military installations at the headland were restored to form the Museum of Coastal Defence which opened in 2000.

Block 10 was built in 1890-1895 with an extension added in 1935. The older part is believed to be one of the earliest buildings constructed in the first phase of the barracks development. It occupies a commanding site towards the north. Originally it was built as Soldiers Quarters for the Royal Artillery.

The architectural style of Block 10 is a simplified Classical design, built in the traditional British Colonial Barrack style. It is a three-storey long rectangular building of brick construction with plaster rendering, featuring open arched, colonnaded and balustraded verandahs on the front and rear facades. The segmental arches are supported on square Tuscan order columns with plaster mouldings. The first and second floor verandahs have classical urn-shaped balustrading. The 1935 extension was generally constructed to the same scale and to the same design as the older block. Internally, the building is a typical army barrack block with adjoining barrack rooms formed by cross walls. The spaces remain structurally similar to their original appearance. The chimneys and most of the fireplaces still exist.

***Architectural
Merit***

Apart from the major extension constructed in 1935, there have been few major changes to the external of the structure over the years. The internal part of the building has also seen little change, mainly because the use as a barrack block has remained the same for a considerable period of time. Although the verandahs on the rear elevations appear to have been partially enclosed at the ablution areas and the old timber roof truss structure has now been replaced, Block 10 retains its elegant authentic appearance. ***Authenticity***

Block 10 is probably the most elegant building in the Barracks and a rare piece of simplified Classical design architecture from the earliest period in the history of this important military site. ***Rarity***

When Block 10 was exclusively used by the British Army, it had little social value to the local community. Now as part of the Lei Yue Mun Park and Holiday Village, it has become a very popular venue for the public, especially children, and therefore acquired higher social value and local interest. ***Social Value & Local Interest***

In terms of military history, as a good representative example of the early colonial military architecture, Block 10 forms an integral part of the overall composition and understanding of the original barracks layout and therefore has been contributing to the group value of the historic buildings in the Barracks, as well as the military installations at the site of the Hong Kong Museum of Coastal Defence and the Sai Wan Fort and Redoubt (西灣炮台及堡壘). The Barracks is also physically close to other graded historic buildings such as Salesian Mission House, Main Building (慈幼會修院主樓) (Grade 2), Salesian Mission House, Villa (慈幼會修院房舍) (Grade 2), Tin Hau Temple (天后廟) (Grade 2), Tam Kung Temple (譚公仙聖廟) (Grade 3) and Shing Wong Temple (城隍廟) (Grade 3). ***Group Value***