

## **Heritage Appraisal of Block 25, 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 Mun (鯉魚門)<sup>1</sup>, 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 Wan<sup>2</sup> (西灣) to the south of the channel.<sup>3</sup> Due to prevalent diseases such as malaria and dysentery which killed a sizable number of British soldiers and civilians, the barracks was later abandoned.<sup>4</sup> 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.

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

<sup>2</sup> The place name of "Sai Wan" was also called "Saiwan" and "Sywan".

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> 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 6<sup>th</sup> 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 25 is located on the rising ground to the south of the former parade ground and is believed to have been built in the late 1890s to early 1900s. It is one of the earliest buildings constructed in the first phase of the barracks development. Throughout the military period of the Barracks, it served as the Officers Mess until the Army moved out.

The architectural style of Block 25 is a simplified Classical design, *Architectural* built in the traditional British Colonial Barrack style. The elegant *Merit* two-storey building features open colonnaded and balustraded verandahs on three sides. The east facade retains much of its original appearance. The walls and columns are painted brickwork. When originally built the brickwork (probably local red bricks) would have been left unpainted. The verandahs are supported by square brick columns with simple bases and capitals. There are moulded cornices at the first floor level and at the eaves level. The first floor verandah has typical urn-shaped classical balustrading, but the balustrading to the ground floor verandah is of a different design. Internally, adjacent rooms have been formed by cross walls. The spaces remain structurally similar to their original appearances, although some fireplaces have been blocked up. The old

internal staircases are still intact (now with extended safety handrails).

There have been alterations and additions to the north end, which projected from the original face of the building. Apart from that, 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 an officers mess has remained the same for about a hundred years. Recent alterations include replacement of the tiled pitched roof and general refurbishment of the interiors to be suitable as accommodation for the Holiday Village. ***Authenticity***

Block 25 is one of the oldest buildings in the Barracks. It is a good representative example of early colonial military architecture. ***Rarity***

When Block 25 was exclusively used by the British Army, it had relatively little social value to the local community. Now as an overnight accommodation in the Lei Yue Mun Park and Holiday Village, it has become a very popular venue for families, and therefore acquired higher social value and local interest. ***Social Value & Local Interest***

In terms of military history, as a good representative example of early colonial military architecture, Block 25 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***