

**Heritage Appraisal of May Hall,
The University of Hong Kong, Pokfulam, Hong Kong**

May Hall was the third student residential hall¹ under the direct management of The University of Hong Kong (the “University”). It was opened on 1 January 1915 and named after Sir Francis Henry May (梅含理), the second Chancellor of the University and the 15th Governor of Hong Kong (1912-1918). *Historical Interest*

Sir Frederick Lugard (盧嘉), the first Chancellor of the University (1911-1912) and the 14th Governor of Hong Kong (1907-1912), recognised that in addition to the transmission of knowledge, the personal development and moral qualities of University’s students were equally important. This could be achieved by compulsory residence either in approved colleges or hostels, or in the University itself, and by the careful selection of the professorial staff.

However, when the University opened on 11 March 1912, its own student residential halls had not yet been built. Sir Frederick Lugard then sought the help from religious organisations whose interest in supporting education and promoting good moral character was in line with the mission of the University. The Church Missionary Society was the first to respond and established St. John’s Hall on Bonham Road to provide accommodation in 1912, in time of the University’s opening.

In 1913, Lugard Hall, the first student residential hall under the direct management of the University, was opened. It set a model for the construction of Eliot Hall and May Hall, which were constructed on higher terraces in almost identical style. Eliot Hall and May Hall were planned with the assistance from the Department of Public Works and constructed at a cost of \$185,840. After the completion of May Hall, these three halls formed an impressive barrack-like group of tiered buildings.

¹ The first two student residential halls were Lugard Hall and Eliot Hall which opened in 1913 and 1914 respectively.

Similar to Eliot Hall and Lugard Hall, May Hall was designed to house around 60 students and with quarters for an English professor and a Chinese assistant in residence, in order to provide close supervision to the students. Students' rooms were located on the first and second floors, while refectory, common rooms, servants' quarters and bathrooms were on the ground floor.

During the Second World War, Lugard Hall and Eliot Hall became the relief hospital to provide additional support to Queen Mary Hospital, when the Main Building of the University was damaged which had been used as the relief hospital. May Hall served as the main residence for staff and students, especially overseas students. Many of the Chinese medical students were allowed to reside in May Hall to assist the Japanese to vaccinate the local population against cholera, smallpox and typhoid.

Dr. Duncan John Sloss, who was the Vice-Chancellor of the University from 1937 to 1949, and the deans arranged a secret Senate meeting on 31 December 1941 and decided to grant war-time degrees to 14 medical students who took their final examinations at the time of the Japanese attack and their studies had been interrupted by the war. On the New Year's Day of 1942, the University Congregation was held in May Hall. After the war, May Hall was re-habilitated and re-opened on 1 January 1948.

In June 1966, an inexhaustible torrential rain caused a large-scale landslide at the slope adjacent to the Eliot Hall and May Hall, which led to an immediate evacuation of the two halls for extensive repairs. The students of the halls were temporarily moved to Lugard Hall and other halls. Two wardens' quarters at the east end of Eliot Hall and May Hall had to be demolished. The University took this opportunity to combine Lugard Hall, Eliot Hall and May Hall into one large residential unit named Old Halls which was opened in 1969 with three wings, i.e. Lugard Wing, Eliot Wing and May Wing. The three buildings were linked together by covered stairways and could accommodate around 200 students. In the same year, the long-established compulsory residence implemented since the University's opening in 1912 was lifted and residence in

hostel became voluntary. Most of the residents in Old Halls were Medical or Engineering students and those students in May Hall were mainly local Chinese. Since 1969, female students were accepted in the Old Halls and they were assigned to accommodate at the east wing on the first and second floors of May Wing.

Eliot Wing and May Wing were reverted to their old names (i.e. Eliot Hall and May Hall) when Lugard Wing was demolished in 1992 to cope with the development policy of the University. Nowadays, most of the areas in May Hall have been converted into administrative offices of departments of the University.

May Hall is a three-storey structure designed by local Hong Kong Architects, Denison, Ram and Gibbs. Red brick is the main building material and they were laid in “Flemish Bond”. The elegant façades feature a rich variety of architectural elements, including curved pediments (hoods) over the entrance doorways, rusticated columns, Doric capitals, window cills, cornices and balustrades. The elaborate designs of the architectural features are widely adopted in the Edwardian period in England. Chinese-style ceramic grilles are also found on the façade to contrast with the red brick wall. The pitched and double-tiled Chinese roofs are a local adaption.

Architectural Merit

Internally, some fireplaces and original decorative details to the walls and ceilings, such as the mouldings and cornices, are basically intact, despite the alterations and renovations carried out over the years. The open verandas to the front elevation remain in good condition, particularly the coloured floor tiles which are very typical of the period.

Although successive major internal renovations have substantially altered the internal layout, some original features such as the patterned floor tiles and ceiling mouldings, still remain. The exterior of the building is largely intact, although the east end of the building has been reconstructed with concrete buttresses added due to the severe landslide damage in 1966. Also, part of the verandah on the ground floor has been enclosed

Authenticity

to meet the current use but could be restored when required.

May Hall is one of the oldest structures on the University campus. Also, it is one of the earliest purpose-built university student residential halls built in Western style and blended with Chinese features that still remains in Hong Kong, reflecting the education vision of the University. ***Rarity***

As one of the purpose-built and one of the oldest student residential halls of the University, May Hall served as an imperative venue to provide informal education for students and to nurture the renowned hall culture of the University. Besides, being one of the historic buildings with rich variety of architectural elements on the University campus, May Hall has long been the well-known landmark which attracts visitors for appreciation. ***Social Value & Local Interest***

May Hall, together with the other historic buildings situated in the University, such as the Main Building (本部大樓) (the exterior of which is declared monument), University Hall (大學堂) (the exterior of which is declared monument), Hung Hing Ying Building (孔慶熒樓) (the exterior of which is declared monument), Tang Chi Ngong Building (鄧志昂樓) (the exterior of which is declared monument), Eliot Hall (儀禮堂) (Grade 1) and Fung Ping Shan Building (馮平山樓) (Grade 1), undoubtedly form a strong cultural environment providing an academic ambience. Other historic buildings in the surrounding areas, such as King's College (英皇書院) (declared monument), Bungalow of West Point Filters (西環濾水廠平房) (Grade 1), Senior Staff Quarters of Elliot Pumping Station and Filters (抽水站及濾水廠高級職員宿舍) (Grade 2), etc., also depict the historical and socio-cultural development of the territory. ***Group Value***

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