

**Heritage Appraisal of Old Tai Po Police Station**  
**No. 11 Wan Tau Kok Lane, Tai Po, the New Territories**

The Old Tai Po Police Station (舊大埔警署) was built in 1899 as the first police station and the Police Headquarters in the New Territories. It operated until the new district police station of Tai Po started its service in 1987. The Old Tai Po Police Station was accorded as a Grade 1 historic building by the Antiquities Advisory Board (“AAB”) in 2009 and has been revitalised into the “Green Hub” to promote conservation and sustainable living since 2015.

*Historical  
Interests*

According to the Convention Respecting an Extension of Hong Kong Territory (《展拓香港界址專條》) in 1898, the New Territories, north of Boundary Street (界限街) to Shenzhen River (深圳河) and 235 islands, were leased to Britain for 99 years. Even though the lease was effective from 1st July 1898, the Hong Kong Government was not in a hurry to take over the New Territories and assigned the Colonial Secretary, Sir Steward Lockhart (1858-1937) to conduct inspection on this newly leased area, the New Territories. Sir Steward Lockhart proposed to set up a government administration and police headquarters in Tai Po which seemed to be at the central location of the New Territories. Matsheds were constructed as temporary accommodation for the Police at Tai Po. Disturbance was provoked after Captain Superintendent Francis Henry May visited Ping Shan on 27 March 1899.

Agitation among local inhabitants arose over the lease of the New Territories. There was objection from local inhabitants in the New Territories towards the British occupation. The New Territories inhabitants believed that the construction of the police station would affect the fengshui (風水) of the area. Matsheds at Flagstaff Hill, Wan Tau Kok Lane which were proposed for flag raising ceremony on 17 April 1899 were burnt on 3rd April 1899.<sup>1</sup> Hong Kong Government proclaimed that it would not interfere with the land, buildings or customs of people. However, in that 9-month period,

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<sup>1</sup> The formally taking over of the New Territories could only be completed when the raising of Union flag ceremony was held in accordance of the International Law.

rumours were continuously spread among the local inhabitants about the take-over of the New Territories such as imposition of taxes and confiscation of assets. Armed disturbance triggered in the New Territories and a serious fighting between the British troops and local inhabitants broke out between 14th and 19th April 1899. The disturbance urged Governor Sir Henry Arthur Blake to hoist the Union flag immediately on 16th April 1899 (which was formerly planned to be carried out on 17th April, 1899)<sup>2</sup> on the Flagstaff Hill, where the Old Tai Po Police Station located. Upon the settlement of the disturbance, colonial rule over the New Territories was formally established. In other words, the Old Tai Po Police Station witnessed the establishment of British colonial rule in the New Territories.

The early establishment of the Old Tai Po Police Station comprised one European police officer in charge, seven Indian police constables and one Chinese police. Other than performing land duties, the Old Tai Po Police Station also played a significant role in policing the water district of the New Territories. Steam launches and pinnace were deployed to police the water district of the New Territories, where the piracy problem was prevalent.

The Old Tai Po Police Station served as a police station for nearly 90 years. Throughout the period, the building came across different challenges. During the Japanese Occupation Period, the Japanese vacated it because of its small size and established another police station in a community centre. When it was vacant, its windows, doors, wooden floor and actually anything usable were looted by nearby residents. The Japanese troops thus dispatched sentries to guard the house to prevent further destruction.

In the afternoon of 24th May 1964, the police of Tai Po Sub-Division at the Old Tai Po Police Station faced a great challenge. Three police officers were shot down by a man who was believed to have been trained as an anti-Japanese guerilla during the early 1940s

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<sup>2</sup> The disturbance was organised by the representatives from different clans in the New Territories. From 14<sup>th</sup> April to 19<sup>th</sup> April 1899, the local inhabitants and the British troops fought against each other. The disturbance continued until the local troops was broken by the heavy fire of the British troops on 19<sup>th</sup> April 1899.

in Lam Chuen. The first of the three deceased officers, Police Corporal Lam Yik-yan (林奕仁), was shot down by the gun man when he was fixing his motorcycle. The other two police officers, Police Constable Kwong Yiu-tong (鄺耀堂) and Superintendent Charles Harbert were later shot down when they were trying to arrest the gun man. The gun man was shot down by a senior police officer soon after he killed Superintendent Charles Harbert. In that operation, three police officers were killed and twelve other police officers were wounded. A board was hung in the canteen of the Old Tai Po Police Station to commemorate the three deceased officers and the tragic day.

In front of the Old Tai Po Police Station, there were two batteries (火炮). They were believed to have been erected in the garden of the Old Tai Po Police Station since the building was built. The cannon rests remain on the site. In addition, there was a field gun in the garden of Old Tai Po Police Station. This 7.5 centimetre gun, which was manufactured in 1896 by Fried Krupp and probably was used in the civil wars in China and later moved to Hong Kong during the Japanese Occupation Period, was found in some scrap metal in an army camp in the New Territories in 1946. It was delivered to the Old Tai Po Police Station and mounted in the grounds as an ornament. In 1964, it was removed from its concrete base and mounted on a gun carriage. Its firing pin was subsequently repaired by the Army which made it possible to fire and it was used on ceremonial occasions, for example, the opening ceremony of Plover Cove Police Station. It is now placed at the main entrance of the Police Museum.

The Old Tai Po Police Station was assigned to the Frontier Division after World War II. It was integrated into the newly established Yuen Long Division in 1963, then changed to Sha Tin Division in 1970. In 1987, the Old Tai Po Police Station was replaced by the new district police station of Tai Po.

After the Old Tai Po Police Station was substituted by the new one, it was changed into the Hong Kong Police Force New Territories North Regional Crime Prevention Office and temporary accommodation and offices for the Marine Police North Division.

The Old Tai Po Police Station was left vacant between 2006 and 2015. In 2015, the Old Tai Po Police Station was revitalised into Green Hub to promote low-carbon living.

The Old Tai Po Police Station situated at the hill top of Wan Tau Kok Lane, a prominent location for overseeing Tolo Harbour before reclamation. It comprises three single-storey Utilitarian buildings, namely Main Building, Staff Quarters Block and Canteen Block. Spacious and flat lawn draws the three buildings together — with the Main Building on the east, the Staff Quarters Block on the west and the Canteen Block on the north.

***Architectural  
Merit***

The Main Building is in utilitarian style. The brick building is simple, economical and yet traditional coupled with verandahs of the south and east elevations, forms a representative example of the classic colonial architectural style. The Main Building has more architectural details than the Staff Quarters Block and the Canteen Block which demonstrated the more significance of the Main Building than the others. Architectural features, such as the verandas and louvre windows have been built to suit the local climate in summer, whilst fireplaces with multiple motifs were used in cold winter. The architectural significance in the Main Building lies in the Dutch gables with oculus and five voussoirs above the windows which form the signature motif of the building. Other architectural features of the building such as the cast iron drainpipe with hopper head, the chimneys which served the fireplaces are still intact. The Chinese pitched roofs with pan and roll tiles at the Main Building demonstrate the influence of Chinese architectural design in the colonial building. Local construction material and technique were adopted.

The interior of the Main Building is simple and functional as befitted police operational requirements. When the Main Building was built, other than kitchen and offices, there were 12 rooms for containing 5 European and 32 Indian or Chinese constables. Cells, charge room and offices were located at the northeast wing near the entrance of verandah. A covered pathway linked the officer quarters at the east wing and the servant quarters at the west wing. The general layout of old police station is intact.

The Staff Quarters Block was to provide accommodation for officers stationed at the police headquarters. Similar to the Main Building, is a one-storey brick walled building with Chinese pitched roof with pan and roll tiles. Open verandahs are built along the front and rear elevations. The triangular gables are prominent on the building. The wooden frame windows made good reference to colonial police station. The rooms are separated by open yard with three quarter rooms on one side and two smaller servant rooms with kitchen on the opposite. In 1960, the three quarters rooms changed to be an accommodation barrack for woman police.

The Canteen Block was lately built in 1960-61. It has been built with open verandah to harmonise with the Main Building and Staff Quarters Block. The corrugated roof was supported by metal trusses. The building was divided into two large rooms as canteen and barrack room.

The external features, such as the guard house and octagonal well near the entrance of the site, the flagpole, the two cannon rests at the front yard of Main Building, and the brick incinerator in the lawn, remain in excellent condition.

The Old Tai Po Police Station has generally retained much of its original appearance and most of its architectural features are still visible in the site despite internal refurbishment, alterations and additions have been made for operation requirements over the 120 years. The original setting of report room with cell and armoury inside retains and reflects the original layout of police station in colonial period.

***Authenticity***

Major alterations and additions were inevitably carried out throughout the late 20<sup>th</sup> century for operation requirement. Additional Canteen Block was built with covered walkway connected to the Main Building to accommodate the increasing number of police officers including the Marine Police who based in Tai Po to operate police launch. Addition of toilets, laundry and storage blocks and steel canopy were carried out. The authenticity of this colonial police

station has to compromise the operation needs inevitably.

From 2013 to 2015, the Old Tai Po Police Station underwent alteration and addition works during revitalisation to its present use as Green Hub to promote sustainable living and integrated conservation. Later-added structures, such as steel purlins and trusses at the Main Building have been removed and replaced by timber structure to reveal the original appearance of the roof. Verandahs at the Main Building which had been covered were restored to the original layout as open verandahs. Metal window frames in the Main Building have been reconstructed with timber frames with reference from the Staff Quarters Block and the design of the same period.

The original architectural features have generally retained much of its original authentic appearance, such as the Dutch gables, ornamental window arches and window sills, cast iron drainpipe with hopper head and the fireplaces. The building generally has been well maintained and its authenticity has been revealed after the revitalisation.

The Old Tai Po Police Station was the first police station and the Police Headquarters in the New Territories. It is also the oldest surviving police station in the New Territories. It is a fine example of police station in early colonial period. ***Rarity***

The Old Tai Po Police Station was constructed on the hill at Wan Tau Tong Lane, which was built along local settlements, on higher and defensive ground for overlooking the plain of the New Territories and the water district. The flag hoisting ceremony at the site of the police station by the British officers represented the establishment of British colonial rule in the New Territories. The social value and local interest of the police station were enhanced due to its role in maintaining law and order in the New Territories since early colonial period. The policing and alternation at the Old Tai Po Police Station were parallel with the development of Tai Po and the Police Force. The increasing activities at Tai Po necessitated the increase of police officers stationed at the police station and hence additional building and alternation inside the police station were ***Social Value & Local Interest***

required. The arrangement on barrack for woman police in 1960 also reflected the increasing proportion of women police in the Police Force.

The Old Tai Po Police Station is located in the vicinity of other government buildings of its time. The Old District Office (North) (舊北區理民府), which stood next to the Old Tai Po Police Station, took up the civil administration of the region in 1907. At the opposite hill, there is the Old Police Bungalow (舊警察宿舍) which was the former residence of the Divisional Superintendent of the New Territories. The Island House (前政務司官邸), the residence of government officials located in Yuen Chau Tsai (元洲仔). From a historical point of view, these buildings, if taken together, have a high group value since they symbolised the establishment of colonial administration and mechanism in maintaining law and order, two components for the consolidation of government authority in Hong Kong.

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