

Historic Building Appraisal
Old Victoria Barracks, Cassels Block
No. 7A Kennedy Road, Hong Kong Park, Central, H.K.

Old Victoria Barracks was one of the first British military compounds in Hong Kong. There were once over thirty military buildings in the Barracks. The buildings which still exist; for example, Cassels Block (卡素樓), Montgomery Block (蒙哥瑪莉樓), Roberts Block (羅拔時樓), Rawlinson House (羅連信樓) and Wavell Block (華福樓) – together with the declared monument Flagstaff House (前三軍司令官邸) – used to serve as residences and dormitories. During the Japanese Occupation (1941-1945), the buildings were used by the Japanese. In 1979, Victoria Barracks was handed back to the Hong Kong Government, and part of it was converted into the Hong Kong Park. Today, the buildings are individually converted into a visual arts centre, offices, and museum respectively.

***Historical
Interest***

Originally known as ‘C’ Block, **Cassels Block** was built as **married army quarters** in the early 1900s to solve the quartering problem following the surrender of North Barracks and part of Wellington Barracks to the Royal Navy. During the Japanese Occupation, the building survived heavy bombardments and was later restored after the war. In 1985, when the former Urban Council decided to build a park on the site of Victoria Barracks, the building was converted into the **Hong Kong Visual Arts Centre** opened on 28 April 1992 by Dr. Ronald Leung Ding-bong (梁定邦), OBE, JP, Chairman of the former Urban Council.

Cassels Block is a three-storey building raised off the ground on low arches. The architectural style is colonial **Edwardian Classical Revival**. The block is built in four stepped sections to follow the sloping site. The main east and west elevations have arched and colonnaded balustraded verandahs, originally open, but now enclosed with glazing. The brick walls, which originally would have been exposed brickwork, are now painted. The elevations have moulded string courses and column capitals, with pediments, entablatures, cornices and parapets at each stepped roof level. The roofs are pitched with several projecting chimney stacks. The internal conversion has been carefully carried out.

***Architectural
Merit***

Cassels Blocks was originally one of two such blocks built side by side, but the other one known as Birdwood Block was demolished. The stepped design of Cassels Block makes it rather special and something of a rarity. As one of the surviving buildings of the old Victoria Barracks, it has built heritage

***Rarity,
Built Heritage
Value &
Authenticity***

value although the conversion works have affected its authenticity.

As army married quarters, the social value of Cassells Blocks was relatively low to the community, but as a visual arts centre it now has considerable social value and local interest.

*Social Value
& Local
Interest*

Cassells Block, together with other blocks of the Old Victoria Barracks, the Flagstaff House (舊三軍司令官邸) and the Former Explosives Magazine (舊域多利軍營軍火庫) in the vicinity form an integral part of the historic compound of the old Victoria Barracks. They are also physically close to declared monuments and items graded by the Antiquities Advisory Board such as St. Joseph's College (聖若瑟書院), Government House (香港禮賓府), St. Paul's Co-educational College (聖保羅男女中學) and First Church of Christ Scientist (基督科學教會香港第一分會).

Group Value

As far as is known there are no plans to close down the Visual Arts Centre so that the question of adaptive re-use does not really arise at present.

*Adaptive
Re-use*