Historic Building Appraisal

Old Victoria Barracks, Roberts Block

No. 42A Kennedy Road, Central, Hong Kong

Historical Interest

Old Victoria Barracks was one of the first British military compounds in Hong Kong. There were over thirty military buildings in the Barracks but most of them were demolished. 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.

Located high above Kennedy Road, Roberts Block was built in the early 1900s and was originally known as army Married Quarters 'E' Block. It was named after the Second World War probably after Brigadier (later Major-General) G.P. Roberts, one of Montgomery's commanders. Since 1986, it has been occupied by the New Life Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association as a hostel (namely, Jockey Club New Life Hostel 賽馬會新生宿舍).

Architectural Merit

This block is three storeys high, divided into three sections with stepped flat roofs and wide projecting eaves. The north elevation is in elegant Edwardian Classical Revival style with open verandahs on all three floors formed by red-brick square columns supporting a classical entablature and moulded cornice at each floor level. The spaces between the columns are filled with classical urn-shaped balustrading. The architectural features are painted white in contrast to the red brickwork. The rear and side walls are painted white with modern windows and exposed plumbing. There are no architectural features on these elevations. The original steel staircases still exist, also some half-glazed wooden doors and fanlights.

Rarity, Built Heritage Value & Authenticity

Roberts Block is quite a rare piece of built heritage as it unspoilt north elevation shows us what these army blocks looked like originally. The authenticity of the interior is not known as access was not obtained by the AMO researchers.

Social Value & Local

As army married quarters, the social value of Roberts Block to the community was relatively low, but the present occupants are providing a

necessary social service and give the building local interest. ***Interest***

Roberts Block, together with other blocks of the Old Victoria Barracks, the Flagstaff House (前三軍司令官邸) 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 items graded by the Antiquities Advisory Board such as St. Joseph's College (聖若瑟書院), 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***