

Historic Building Appraisal
Former Pumping Station of Water Supplies Department
No. 344 Shanghai Street, Yau Ma Tei, Kowloon

Also known as “The Red Brick House” (紅磚屋), the former **Historical Interest** Pumping Station of Water Supplies Department (舊水務署抽水站) was built in 1895. It is the oldest pumping station in the territory, even older than Tai Tam Tuk Pumping Station (大潭篤泵房) which was constructed in 1917. Its founding was proposed in 1890 by Osbert Chadwick (查維克), consulting engineer of the Crown Agents, who proposed in 1890 the building plan for a water supply system in Kowloon. He suggested collecting subterranean water by building underground mud barriers. Although his proposal was not adopted immediately, his proposal contributed to the construction of this pumping station.

The pumping station abstracted water from three wells nearby for the early inhabitants in the Kowloon Peninsula. With the supply of fresh water, commercial activities were able to take place and normal daily living was ensured. Due to this reason, the population of Kowloon was increased. In 1891, the population of Kowloon was approximately 23,000. It was increased by 33% to 34,782 by 1897.

The pumping station was equipped with steam-driven pumps, which were imported from England, and able to pump an estimated 400,000 gallons of water. The pumping station originally comprised four parts, namely, an engine room, a workshop, a chimneystack and an engineer’s office. Except for the engineer’s office, the other parts of the pumping station have been demolished.

This pumping station lost its importance in the twentieth century. The Kowloon Reservoir was built in 1906 and other reservoirs were subsequently built. In the 1910s-1920s, the structure was converted into a post office and was abandoned in 1967. It has been restored and undergone adaptive re-use.

This two-storey red-brick building is built in Neo-Classical style with **Architectural Merit** Arts and Crafts influence. It has a pitched Chinese-tiled roof with a chimney stack sitting on the ridge. Windows are wooden casements set in window openings with granite cills and lintels. Rough brick relieving arches can be seen above the lintels. Doors are wooden, cross braced and battened. The Shanghai Street elevation has an arched verandah now enclosed with windows. The ornamental ironwork balustrading has been retained. Internally there is an arcade of columns and arches on the ground floor. The

walls are plastered and painted. The floor is screeded. The first floor still has original wooden doors and windows, cornices, skirtings and floor boarding.

Although red-brick buildings were once quite commonly seen they are becoming rarer. This building has built heritage value because it is historic and has architectural merit. It has recently been restored and much of the building features have been preserved, although other buildings in the former pumping station complex, including a latrine, cookhouse, chimney stack and boundary wall, have been demolished.

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

The social value of the building lies in the part it played in early water supply distribution in Kowloon. It is known locally as “The Red Brick House” (紅磚屋), and is one of the few historic buildings and landmarks still left in Yau Ma Tei.

***Social Value
& Local
Interest***

Yau Ma Tei is the oldest developed urban region in Kowloon. The former pumping station is within walking distance of other historic buildings, such as Yau Ma Tei Theatre (油麻地戲院), Yau Ma Tei Wholesale Fruit Market (油麻地果欄) and Yau Ma Tei Police Station (油麻地警署) (all Grade 2), Tin Hau Temple (天后古廟, Declared Monument) on Temple Street and Tung Wah Museum (東華三院文物館, Declared Monument).

Group Value