Historic Building Appraisal

Church Guest House

No. 1 Upper Albert Road, Central, H.K.

Historical Interest

Church Guest House (教堂禮賓樓), also known as Martin House, was built in 1919. It is a three-storey building owned by the Bishop of Victoria, Hong Kong. The main function of this building is residential use. It was purposely built and first used as the hostel of St. Paul's College (聖保羅書院), a school with a long history since the 19th century and was formerly situated on Glenealy Road. Shortly after the Second World War, Ms Han Suyin (韓素音), the author of a famous novel titled *A many-splendoured thing,* has once resided there. In fact, many missionaries who moved to Hong Kong also stayed there in that period. Han Suyin's novel was subsequently produced into a Hollywood film known as "Love is a many-splendored thing" (生死戀) (1955) starring William Holden (威廉荷頓) and Jennifer Jones (珍妮佛鐘斯).

Architectural Merit

The front façade of the Church Guest House facing Upper Albert Road is obscured by trees so that its architectural qualities cannot really be appreciated. The style has been described as Neo-Classical with Baroque influence although the stylised classical features are more akin to Art Deco. The main entrance porch is formed by square columns, arches, brackets and a flat roof with a parapet wall in a heavy blocky geometric style. The columns are very unusual and do not conform to any formal classical order. The glazing pattern of the entrance doors shows definite Art Deco influence although this style did not come into vogue until the 1920s and only was given its name in the 1960s.

The elevations follow classical principles with giant pilasters, string courses, entablatures, cornices and ornamental parapets, but like the porch do not conform to any formal classical order. There appears to have been an open arched verandah at first floor level but this has been enclosed with windows. The central portion of the roof is pitched and covered with aluminum sheeting. The two side wings have flat roofs. Several ornate chimney stacks can be seen. The front parapet wall has a very distinctive pattern and matches the boundary wall. The building is rendered or stuccoed and tastefully painted in grey and white. The interior of the building retains many original features such as arches, doors, cornices, etc.

Rarity, Built Heritage Value & Authenticity

This style of architecture is rarely seen and the Church Guest House may be unique in Hong Kong. It has obvious built heritage value and great architectural interest. Some alterations have been made which are fairly obvious but the building retains much of its authentic appearance.

Social Value & Local Interest

The social value of Church Guest House lies in the historical role it has played as a hostel to St. Paul's College, and also as a hostel for missionaries, etc. Its distinctive architecture makes it a well known building in Upper Albert Road.

Group Value

The Church Guest House has historical and local interest and also group value being situated alongside Bishop's House (會督府, Grade 1), St. Paul's Church (聖保羅堂, Grade 1) and the Old S.K.H. Kei Yan Primary School (舊聖公會基恩小學, now Kong Kit Building, originally the south wing of St. Paul's College, Grade 2). Other historic buildings around the area include the Old Dairy Farm Depot (舊牛奶公司倉庫, Grade 1) and the Old Victoria Barracks (舊域多利軍營, Grade 1).