

Historic Building Appraisal
Former Explosives Magazine of the Old Victoria Barracks
Justice Drive, Central, Hong Kong

The buildings which comprise the Former Explosive Magazine (舊域多利軍營軍火庫) were intended to serve as a storehouse of explosives for the British Army of the Old Victoria Barracks. Erected between 1843 and 1874, the Magazine comprises three main buildings separated by large earth blast bunds. **Magazine A** and the **Old Laboratory** were in existence by 1868. **Magazine B** and the North and South Traverses (the large earth blast bunds separating the magazines for safety concern) were added between 1901 and 1925. In 1979, the Victoria Barracks were vacated and later redeveloped into the Hong Kong Park. The Former Explosives Magazine became the workshops and storehouses of different Government departments. The compound is of great interest to military historians being a superb example of a Victorian British Army explosives magazine probably unique to this part of the world.

*Historical
Interest*

The **Old Laboratory** on the north side is a single-storey building built on top of a massive granite retaining wall. There is a small detached toilet block at one end. The pitched roof is finished with Chinese tiles and extended at the front to form a colonnaded flag-stoned verandah. Some doors and windows may be original, and there are interesting architectural features such as the King-post roof trusses and dragon ties now considered to be obsolete construction.

*Architectural
Merit*

The central building was the old magazine storehouse for explosives known as **Magazine A**. It has thick granite walls with brick barrel vaulted roofs to the four storerooms. It is believed that it was purposely built in this way so that in the event of an explosion the blast would be directed upwards through the roof. There is a red-brick annex at the east end of the building. The remains of an old railway track for magazine trucks can still be seen outside this building.

Magazine B is situated at the south side of the compound at the foot of the retaining slope to Kennedy Road. It is a single-storey brick-built building with a vaulted roof and a verandah on the north elevation. There is a red-brick annex at the west end.

The three buildings, which may be categorised as **Utilitarian**, do not possess great architectural merit, but the compound is of great interest to military historians being a superb example of a Victorian British Army explosives magazine probably unique to this part of the world. It must be regarded as a very rare piece of built heritage. The buildings, although dilapidated, retain their original appearance and authenticity.

*Rarity,
Built Heritage
Value &
Authenticity*

The social value to the community of the Former Explosives Depot lies in the role it played in the old days in the defensive system of Hong Kong. It is believed that Magazine Gap and Magazine Gap Road take their names from the magazine compound.

*Social Value
& Local
Interest*

The Former Explosives Magazine is an integral part of the historic compound of the Old Victoria Barracks, including Rawlinson House (羅連信樓), Cassels Block (卡素樓), Wavell Block (華福樓), Roberts Block (羅拔時樓) and Montgomery Block (蒙高瑪利樓) in the vicinity. In the northern side is another old building known as Block GG which was an Army Pay Corps Office for the former military camp and is considered an integrated part of the historic magazine buildings. It is also enclosed in an environment rich in natural resources.

Group Value

The magazine buildings will be preserved and restored by incorporated in a scheme to convert the compound into a “Place of Recreation, Sports and Culture” to be run by the **Asia Society Hong Kong Center** which was established in 1990 and has become a forum for public discussion of regional and global affairs.

*Adaptive
Re-use*