Historic Building Appraisal

No. 4 Hospital Road,
Mid-Levels, Hong Kong

Historical Interest

The buildings on No. 4 Hospital Road fall on a triangular site opposite Hop Yat Church. Built in 1921, they were quarters for scavenging coolies. They comprise (a) the **Main Block** which gave accommodation for 192 coolies and six foremen and (b) the **Head Foreman's Quarters** which is a small detached building of two living rooms, bath room, kitchen &c. on the corner of the site. The Main Block is of five floors as follows:- sub-basement; store and a public latrine basement; ground, first and second floors – each consists of two large dormitories, a mess room, two kitchens and two foremen's rooms. The contractor was Messrs. Wing Lee & Co. and the cost of construction was HK$133,372. The buildings were once used as staff quarters of the now-defunct Urban Services Department, a street sleepers shelter by the Department of Social Welfare and the office accommodation of Food and Environmental Hygiene Department. It is currently used as the Headquarters of the GX Foundation, a global humanitarian assistance organisation of Hong Kong.

Architectural Merit

The architectural style can be called "stylized neo-classical" with emphasis on vertical and horizontal elements which give the building a Greek Revival appearance. There are two side entrance with paneled doors and classical door surrounds featuring heavily moulded shouldered architraves and flat arches in the Greek style with elongated keystones. The ground floor façade is built of rusticated stonework to form the *piano nobile* or main floor which forms a plinth on which to set the building. A group of three arched doorways is set in the center of the north elevation approached by a grand flight of granite steps. This may have been the main entrance to the public toilets originally, but the doorways are now hung with heavy battened double doors.

The main walls of the building are of painted brickwork with regular rows of tall casement windows at each floor level. The verticality of the window arrangement is united by a plain horizontal band at second floor level. The roof is flat with a projecting moulded cornice at parapet level. External architectural features are minimal but shaped cantilevered brackets on the north elevation at ground level are noteworthy. The building is approached from the north by a flight of steps from Pound Lane or Rutter Street. A separate single storey squat square building set on a rusticated stone plinth is built at the north apex of the triangle, and has a rather unusual type of pitched roof.

Internally the floors are served by cantilevered stone staircases featuring plain ironwork balustrading with moulded hardwood handrails. Many of the original paneled doors and fanlights still remain.

For many years this building presented a very stably appearance and was this an eyesore on this prominent site. The building was renovated in 2007/08 by the Architectural Service Department and it now looks very smart sporting a colour scheme that enhances its neo-classical façade. The architectural can now be much more appreciated.

Buildings of this style from the 1920s' era are now quite rare in Hong Kong. It is a building that can stand alone due to its architectural symmetry and does not need other buildings to enhance it or give it group value. The nearest historic building to it in the Hop Yat Church at Bonham Road. ***Rarity, Built Heritage Value & Authenticity***

It is believed that there was some internal alteration work during the 2007/08 renovation including replacement of some windows. The general appearance, however, externally has not changed much and its architectural authenticity therefore has not been impaired significantly.

Initially built as quarters for scavenging coolies, the building contributes to the history of municipal services in Hong Kong. They therefore have great social value and local interest. ***Social Value & Local Interest***

Together with other historic buildings nearby – e.g. Hop Yat Church, London Mission Building (倫敦傳道會大樓) in Nos. 78 -80 Robinson Road, as well as other historic items graded by the Antiquities Advisory Board nearby including Ohel Leah Synagogue (猶太教莉亞堂 / 猶太廟), Jamia Mosque (清真寺) and Kom Tong Hall (甘棠第) – it has certain group value. ***Group Value***

The best use is probably that for which it is being used at present. ***Adaptive Re-use***