

Historic Building Appraisal

Ex-Commodore's House, No. 5 Bowen Road, Central, Hong Kong

Ex-Commodore's House (前准將官邸) at No. 5 Bowen Road was built in 1914 for the Secretary of **Hongkong Land Investment and Agency Company Limited** (香港置地投資及代理有限公司). This Company was founded in 1889 by two prominent businessmen, Sir Catchick Paul Chater, an Armenian born in an old commercial family in Calcutta, and his partner James Johnstone Keswick, a *Tai-pan* (大班) of Jardine, Matheson & Company (怡和洋行). The Company changed its name into the Hongkong Land Company Limited (香港置地公司) in 1971. **Historical Interest**

In 1923 Mr. Ho Leung (何亮), who was son of Mr. Ho Fook (何福, brother of Sir Robert Hotung) and the comprador of Jardine, Matheson & Company, purchased the building at a cost of \$67,500. After his death, his wife Edna Ho inherited the premises in 1934. One year later, the House was sold back to the Hongkong Land Investment and Agency Company Limited, and was then converted into the residence of the then Company's Secretary O. Eager. He lived there until 1941. During the Japanese Occupation, the invading Japanese Naval Commander occupied the House and turned it into his living quarters.

After changing hands several times, the Royal Navy eventually acquired the house, which then became the Naval Commander's residence known as the "Commodore's House". In 1979 the house was handed over to the Hong Kong Government and was used for office and storage purposes before being leased to **Mother's Choice** (母親的抉擇), a local charitable organization, as a baby care centre.

The house is a three-storey building situated on an awkward site in a corner formed by the Peak Tramway and Magazine Gap Road. The architectural style is **Neo-Classical** with **Baroque** and **Mannerist** features. Classical elements and decorations include moulded cornices and string courses, balustrades, Corinthian columns, stucco-work, segmental arches and many other ornamental features designed to show the wealth and status of the owner. Internally, the classical elegance of the rooms still predominates, in spite of modern intrusions. Fluted columns on pedestals with Corinthian capitals support entablatures with dentil mouldings, and glazed and panelled doors with moulded architraves add to the architectural splendour. Although there is ample evidence of alterations and additions, much of the original house remains, making the house a rare example **Architectural Merit**
Built Heritage Value
Authenticity, Rarity,

of its kind in the locality and of obvious built heritage value and local interest. Its ***Social Value & Local Interest*** social value lies in its importance as a residence for high-ranking people in commerce, industry and the Royal Navy.

The house is physically close to a number of historic buildings, namely, St. Paul's Co-educational College (聖保羅男女中學), First Church of Christ Scientist (基督科學教會香港第一分會) and The Union Church (香港佑寧堂). Many Declared Monuments are also nearby; for example, Helena May (梅夫人婦女會), St. Joseph's College (聖若瑟書院), and Government House (香港禮賓府). ***Group Value***

The house, which started as a residence, has also been used for offices and storage purposes and now as a baby care centre. The elegant architecture surely ***Adaptive Re-use*** deserves a better adaptive re-use, preferably a use which would showcase the house to the public and also to tourists as an image of old Hong Kong.