

Historic Building Appraisal
Former Whitfield Barracks, Block 58
Kowloon Park, Tsim Sha Tsui, Kowloon

The site on which Kowloon Park, formerly Whitfield Barracks (威菲路軍營), now stands was designated a military area in 1864. The barracks was named after Major General H.W. Whitfield, Major General China, Hong Kong and Straits Settlement (1869-1874). The first troops to be garrisoned at the barracks were Indian soldiers of the Hong Kong Regiment. Troops were at first accommodated in tents and matsheds, but later more permanent buildings were erected. By 1910, 85 barrack buildings had been constructed.

*Historical
Interest*

Prior to the outbreak of the Second World War, certain precautions were carried out in Hong Kong and Kowloon. Whitfield Barracks, one of the vital strategic points in Kowloon, was responsible to prepare the precaution work and was part of the defense scheme of Hong Kong. During the Japanese Occupation (1941-1945), it was believed that Whitfield Barracks was used as internment camp. Immediately after the War in 1945, the Japanese forces were evacuated from Hong Kong Island to Kowloon. It was assumed that part of the disarmed army was moved to Whitfield Barracks, which became a temporary Prisoners of War camp.

The site of Whitfield Barracks was handed over to the Government in 1967. In 1970, the then Urban Council took over the site and redeveloped it into the Kowloon Park. Most barrack buildings were demolished and only four blocks are left for reuse. **Block 58** (formerly Block A) was probably built in the late 1890s. It is at present used as a store by the Hong Kong Museum of History.

Block 58 is situated at the southwest corner of Kowloon Park at the top of the tree-lined slope along Haiphong Road. A flight of steps leading up to Block 58 from Haiphong Road has been blocked up and access is now from inside the park. The building is a typical Colonial Neo-Classical army barrack block of the period, being a long two-storey block with verandahs on the north and south elevations (now blocked up). The ground floor verandah is formed by a series of key-stoned arches supported on columns, whilst the first floor verandah is formed by a series of rectangular openings divided by square columns with simple bases and capitals. There is a wide overhanging eaves and a pitched roof of Chinese tiles with gable end walls. The interior probably originally had cross walls every two bays to form barrack rooms. The block, since conversion into a museum store, is virtually windowless with air conditioners fitted in every bay.

*Architectural
Merit*

The exterior walls are painted white and the blocked up verandah bays painted dark green.

As one of the first army barrack blocks to be built in Kowloon, Block 58 has historical interest and built heritage value. It cannot be said to be rare or unique since similar barrack blocks exist in other old army camps. Unfortunately the authenticity of the building has been spoilt by the conversion works but this is considered to be reversible.

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

The building has never had much social value to the local community as it has only been used for barrack accommodation and museum storage. It is not open to the public and therefore only has limited local interest except to military enthusiasts.

***Social Value
& Local
Interest***

Whitfield Barracks is important both architecturally and historically as an integral component of Tsim Sha Tsui. Together with Gun Club Hill Barracks (槍會山軍營), the subject barracks showed the military importance of Tsim Sha Tsui in the past. The architecturally interesting Kowloon Mosque and Islamic Centre (九龍清真寺) besides the Kowloon Park has close association with the history of barracks. Quite a number of declared monuments are found in close proximity, they include the Former Kowloon-Canton Railway Clock Tower (前九廣鐵路鐘樓), the Former Marine Police Headquarters (水警總區總部), the Hong Kong Observatory (香港天文台) and the Former Kowloon British School (前九龍英童學校).

Group Value