

**Historic Building Appraisal**  
**Magazine Building**  
**Magazine Island, South of Kellett Bay, Hong Kong**

The Magazine Building is located at the summit of Magazine Island *Historical*  
 (formerly known as One Tree Island) – a small island just west of Ap Lei Chau *Interest*  
 (鴨脷洲) in the East Lamma Channel (東博寮海峽). The magazine was built in  
 1887-1888 by the British Dynamite Company (later the Nobel's Explosives  
 Company) – which was founded at Ardeer, England, in 1871. The Company  
 was the brainchild of Alfred Nobel, who ran a business in the manufacture of  
 blasting explosives. So successful was his business that his company not only  
 executed orders for home consumption, but exported explosives to Asia, South  
 America and other parts of the world.

The major reason why the Government permitted the establishment of the  
 private magazine was to relieve the storage capacity of the Stonecutters Island's  
 Magazine due to a lack of “fit space”. Also, the establishment of a private  
 magazine “within the harbour defences” would enhance “future protection of  
 the Colony” and save plenty of “valuable time” in case of hostilities during  
 which “the explosives had to be removed to some place within the harbour  
 defences” – to quote the words of Colonel A. J. Storer, Chief Royal Engineer of  
 the South China Command.

The Government denied renewal of the lease on Magazine Island in 1908  
 and the magazine was closed and abandoned ever since. The real reasons for the  
 non-renewal of the lease cannot be fully ascertained, but it is believed that the  
 Government decision was made partly because it was considered militarily  
 inappropriate to retain a private magazine in this area and partly because the  
 government depot on Green Island for the storage of explosives was  
 constructed in February 1906.

The building is an elongated barrel-vaulted structure believed to be built of *Architectural*  
 stout granite walls with buttresses, vault ribs, and a horizontal band course, *Merit*  
 rendered externally and internally. Doors and windows are dressed in granite.  
 The thickness of the barrel vault tapers at the crown so that in the event of an  
 explosion, the blast would be directed upwards through the roof. Small square  
 recesses in the ceiling were probably magazine ventilators. There is an entrance  
 porch built at the west end of the magazine. Internally the magazine is devoid  
 of any architectural features, shelves, racks, partitions, lamp passages, etc.,  
 normally found in Victorian magazines. There is no examining room where

explosives were examined on arrival, and also there appears to be no shifting room where magazine workers could change in and out of magazine working clothes, although the entrance porch may have been used for this purpose. All in all, the magazine structure appears to be rather basic in design and one wonders whether it actually complied with magazine conditions and regulations in force at the time. As for architectural classification it probably is best put into the **Utilitarian** category.

The Magazine Building is an interesting Victorian structure with rarity and built heritage value. It does not appear to have been altered in any way and retains its authentic appearance. Another well-recognized set of buildings of the similar type is the Former Explosives Magazine in Central. An Underground Magazine is also found in the Stonecutters Island Barracks in Sham Shui Po.

*Rarity,  
Built Heritage  
Value &  
Authenticity*

The Magazine Building does not appear to have any social value at all, and it appears to have been left vacant and abandoned since its closure in 1908. As a specialist building for the storage of private explosives it has interest for the historian and is worthy of further study.

*Social Value  
& Local  
Interest*

The specialist nature of the structure and the location make an adaptive re-use rather difficult to find. The island seems to have steep rocky unguarded cliffs and it would not to be a good idea to encourage people to go there for obvious safety reasons.

*Adaptive  
Re-use*