

Historic Building Appraisal
Lutheran Yan Kwong Church,
Ma On Shan Tsuen Road, Sha Tin, N.T.

For decades, the mountain village in Ma On Shan was catered to by two churches – one Catholic church whilst the other a Lutheran church, which offered food and supplies to the miners and their families. The five-building complex included a church, a primary school, a kindergarten, quarters, and a store, known collectively as Lutheran Yan Kwong Church (信義會恩光堂). Lutheran Yan Kwong Church was inaugurated on 22 June 1952, even earlier than the establishment of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hong Kong (香港基督教信義會) on 27 February 1954. *Historical Interest*

The Ma On Shan Iron Mine, opened in 1906, developed on a vast scale shortly after the Second World War. At the time, the refugees who flooded in from all over China provided workforce for the extraction of deposits. Also, a great change in the methods of iron ore mining took place in Ma On Shan in 1953, when underground mining was resorted to. These led to great increases in the output of iron ore. Consequently, the small village of Ma On Shan Tsuen was swamped with new arrivals, nearly all of them came from China. With them, the miners brought their families to live in the area.

In 1950 a number of Lutheran pastors arrived at the Ma On Shan Iron Mine where they set up the Lutheran Yan Kwong congregation in September that year. For a long time, the parcels of food, clothing and medicine given by the Church were of great help to the miners, whose salaries could barely support their families. The Lutheran as well as the Catholic churches were a place where the miners and their family members listened to the sermon. Occasionally, they had film-shows provided by the two churches, which also provided free education to their children.

For economic reasons the mine ceased operation as from 1976. The population of the village decreased with the departure of the miners and their families since then. In 1976 the primary school and kindergarten were closed. Next year, the old school premises were turned into Lutheran Grace Youth Camp (恩青營). Lutheran Primary School (信義恩光小學) was relocated to Heng On Estate (恆安邨) and was renamed Ma On Shan Lutheran Primary School (馬鞍山信義學校) in 1987.

The entrance to the church compound is a simple gateway at the top of some steps consisting of two piers supporting a lintel and triangular pediment surmounted by a plain Latin cross. The gateway is rendered and painted with the Chinese characters “恩光堂” on the lintel. The gate is made of wire mesh and steel framing. *Architectural Merit*

The church is a simple one storey utilitarian building with white painted walls, a pitched roof of corrugated asbestos sheeting, and metal framed windows. The main part of the church is rectangular in plan with extra rooms built on to the sides as lean-to extensions. Architectural features include the shaped gable ends, a few pointed lancet windows, and a bell cote surmounted by a simple Latin cross at the apex of the north-east end. The Chinese characters “信義會禮拜堂” are painted on the gable and above the entrance door.

Internally the main part of the church is open plan, with no division or separation between the nave (where the congregation sat during services) and the chancel where the altar is normally placed. Instead of the normal altar there is decorated pedestal table on which is placed a Calvary cross. The pedestal table is situated on raised semi-circular dais railed off by an ornamental wooden balustrade. On the wall behind there is a painted mural of Jesus the Good Shepherd holding a lamb and shepherd's crook.

The underside (soffit) of the roof is exposed showing green-painted wooden purlins and trusses. The roof of the side extension has steel lattice trusses. The floor is screeded. Furnishings include wooden pews, chairs, tables, cupboards, electrical installations, ceiling fans and fluorescent strip lighting. The walls are plastered and painted white. The windows in the side room are decorated with ornamental transparent film. This room contains a small shrine littered with religious paraphernalia

Lutheran Yan Kwong Church is a special piece of built heritage in Ma On Shan Mine with considerable historic interest. The Church was completely abandoned in 2003 after landslides made the buildings too dangerous to occupy. With earthworks complete, the Church now hopes to revitalize the building. The building itself and the surroundings are currently maintained in a satisfactory state and the site still retains its authentic appearance.

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

Lutheran Yan Kwong Church was another centre of religion, education and social activities of Ma On Shan villagers for decades, besides the Roman Catholic St. Joseph's Church. Their lives got improved because of the Lutheran pastors. Therefore the building has a high local interest. Recently, there is a plan to revitalize the Church buildings and convert them into a daytime activity centre to publicize the history of the mine and the life stories of the mining families.

***Social Value
& Local
Interest***

Lutheran Yan Kwong Church gave rise to close-knit community high in the hills of Ma On Shan and the mining industry produced more than just iron ore; it forged lifelong friendships among the workers. On Sunday, 4 May 2014, some 60 residents of the former mining village gathered for a reunion

in their old village church.

Lutheran Yan Kwong Church has group values with other old structures related to the Ma On Shan Mine, such as the St. Joseph's Church (天主堂(聖若瑟堂)建築群), Exterior wall of Mines 110 ML and 240 ML (110ML 及 240ML 礦洞外牆), and mineral preparation plant (選礦廠). Due to its unique value, the site has potential to be developed as a cultural and eco-tourism destination include visiting the abandoned iron mine, viewing geology, rocks and minerals in the area, and villages, churches and schools. **Group Value**

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