

Historic Building Appraisal
Gatekeeper's Lodge of Marble Hall
No. 1 Conduit Road, Mid-Levels, Hong Kong

The site of No. 1 Conduit Road is comprised of a block of 20-storey government quarters (30-40 years old) and a two-storey pitched-roof building (hereafter, “the building”). Historical records show that the building was built as the Gatekeeper's Lodge (守衛室) of Marble Hall (雲石堂) which was the private residence of Sir Paul Chater (遮打爵士) (1846-1926), a Calcutta-born Armenian merchant of great wealth. The Gatekeeper's Lodge was probably built in 1901/1902 when Marble Hall was built but in any case no later than 1918, when it appears in a site plan prepared by the Director of Public Works. *Historical Interest*

Located at a site some 500 feet above sea level, Marble Hall was executed in marble specially quarried in Italy and Greece and polished in Belgium. It has been regarded as one of the finest buildings ever constructed in Hong Kong. It stood on a site where the above-said block of government quarters stands today. The main building of Marble Hall has disappeared, but the photos enclosed to the Colonial Office files reveal how palatial and sumptuously furnished a home it once was.

Sir Paul Chater was a multi-layered and rich personality in Hong Kong. He had a finger in different kinds of profitable pie – wharfing, electricity, trams, ferries, banking, hotels and land. He served as an appointed unofficial member of the Legislative Council for nearly 20 years. He presided over the Jockey Club for many years. He funded the construction of St. Andrew's Church in Kowloon and the clock tower of the HKU Main Building. He donated his private art collections to Hong Kong Government.

Sir Paul Chater's will stipulated Marble Hall be bequeathed to Hong Kong Government upon the death of his wife. After she died in 1935, Marble Hall became the colony's “Admiralty House” – the official residence of the Naval Commander-in-Chief – until World War II when the Japanese took it over. In May 1946 Marble Hall was devastated by a fire. It stood empty until it was demolished in 1953 to make way for redevelopment, leaving the Gatekeeper's Lodge as the only reminder of Chater's residence.

Shortly after World War II, the Gatekeeper's Lodge was leased to the Royal Inter-ocean Lines for use. Later on, the Government took it over and used it as government staff quarters. Before 2000, it was used by the now-defunct Urban Services Department (USD) as staff quarters. It was called “Marble Hall USD Staff Quarters” in the 1990s, then “Chater Hall Gardener's Quarters”. Until recent times, the building has been partially used for storage by landscape staff and partially vacant. Nowadays, it is totally vacant.

The building falls on a triangular site opposite the 20-storey government quarters to its south and Botanic Terrace (芝蘭台) to its north. It is elevated above the level of Conduit Road on a platform cut into the hillside supported by stone retaining walls built of layers of granite blocks. The granite walls form a habitat for trees whose roots sprawl densely on the wall surfaces, providing a means of anchorage. The entrance way is built of a grand flight of granite steps.

***Architectural
Merit***

The building is a two-storey Chinese tiled pitched-roof structure. Typical architectural features include a verandah with iron railings, expressed rainwater pipes and a chimney stack to serve the kitchen. The exterior wall of the building facing Botanic Terrace is of painted brickwork with regular rows of casement windows at each floor level. Many of the original doors and louvered timber shutters still remain. The use of Chinese tiles for the pitched roof supported on timber frame is a local adaptation.

The building bears witness to Chater's residence and should be preserved if at all possible as a very fine example of this form of architecture in its setting. It has built heritage value, giving us a glimpse of the past.

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

As far as can be seen there have not been any major alterations so that the building retains its authenticity. At least one window frame has been replaced with aluminium one, but this alteration may be reversible.

The building and its immediate environs are of considerable social value and local interest. Clearly associated with Sir Paul Chater's home, the building gives us a glimpse of the past. The stone walls with old trees growing on them contribute to the landscape character of the area.

***Social Value
& Local
Interest***

The graded historic buildings nearest to it include Hong Kong Catholic Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception (天主教聖母無原罪主教座堂) at No. 16 Caine Road and Jamia Mosque (清真寺) at No. 30 Shelley Street.

Group Value

If the building is to be saved an appropriate adaptive re-use needs to be found which would showcase it to the public and also to tourists as an image of old Hong Kong.

***Adaptive
Re-use***