

Historic Building Appraisal

No. 27 Lugard Road

The Peak, H.K.

Many roads in Hong Kong recall former governors, colonial secretaries and commanding generals and this road on the Peak, constructed in the early 20th century and named after Sir Frederick Lugard (governor from 1907-1912) is an example. The Peak (Victoria Peak) towers over Central district on Hong Kong Island, attracting locals and visitors with cool breezes and stunning views over the harbour. Many aspired to live here, deterred only by lofty prices and the blanket of fog. With the construction of the Peak Tram in 1888, more people moved there to live. *Historical Interest*

The house in No. 27 Lugard Road was initially associated with a family of architects from England, surnamed Bird, who started living in Hong Kong from 1904. Constructed in **1914** when the first section of Lugard Road was completed¹, No. 27 Lugard Road was first owned by Herbert William Bird (born in 1872), who bought the land at a price of \$2,160 on 27 July 1914 in public auction. H. W. Bird was a partner of the architectural practice, Palmer & Bird – now Palmer & Turner (still a prominent architectural firm to this day). H.W. Bird was also a public figure. He was a director and the chairman of the Shek O Country Club (石澳鄉村俱樂部), the president of the Royal Society of St. George (聖喬治皇家學會), and vice-presidents of the Hong Kong Club (香港會所) and the Hong Kong Philharmonic Society in the 1920s. He was also a non-official Justice of the Peace from 1904 to 1926, a juror on the List of Jurors from 1905 to 1924 and an Unofficial Member of the Legislative Council from 1921 to 1927.

No. 27 Lugard Road was designed by H.W Bird's younger brother, Lennox Godfrey Bird (1878-1956) who was a partner of Palmer & Turner. Being a director of the Shek O Development Co. Ltd. (石澳道業主委員會), L.G. Bird was the architect of many bungalows in Shek O. L.G. Bird also served the community. From 1911 until the outbreak of the First World War, he was in command of the Reserve Company of the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps (香港義勇防衛軍) and was on active service between 1914 and 1918 and later awarded the "Distinguished Service Order" (D.S.O). In addition, he was a juror on the List of Jurors (1905 – 1914, 1916, 1920 – 1924 and 1935), the Commandant of the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps from

¹ "Report of the Director of the Public Works for the Year 1914", *Administrative Report for the Year 1914*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong Government, 1915.

1920 to 1933, a non-official Justice of the Peace (1912 – 1916, 1925 – 1928 and 1932 – 1937), and the presidents of the Royal Society of St. George and the Hong Kong Hockey Club (香港曲棍球會) in the 1920s. In 1929, L.G. Bird was awarded the “Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire” (O.B.E.), rewarding him for his contribution to society. He was the first owner of No. 28 Lugard Road built in 1924 (Grade 3).

This two-storey dwelling was bought by the Taikoo Dockyard and Engineering Company of Hong Kong Limited 太古船塢 (a branch of the Swire Group) in 1930 and since then became a residence of the company’s staff and their family. A former occupant of the house, Mrs Jean Mackie (nee Finnie) whose father was employed by the Company, was actually born in the house because, after her mother fell down the enormous staircase when heavily overdue with her, the sedan chair bearers could not get to the house in time to take her mother to the Matilda Hospital (明德醫院) at Mount Kellett which was opened in 1907 and is still one of Hong Kong’s most popular private hospitals.

The house has a fascinating history encompassing lost silver, typhoons and a bomb blast. It was once damaged by a typhoon in November 1939, when the roof cracked very badly in the storm. When the Japanese invaded Hong Kong just before Christmas 1941, the old tennis court of No. 27 Lugard Road was hit by a bomb. This tennis court, which is now the site of a swimming pool, was where Miss Finnie’s mother had buried some of the family silver. While still a toddler, Miss Finnie (later Mrs Jean Mackie) was evacuated to Canada with her mother to avoid the war. After the war, the new owner Butterfield & Swire (太古洋行) turned the house into a mess for their bachelor staff.

The house is built to an asymmetrical plan on a north-south axis; it is two storeys high with a raised terrace on two sides. Servants’ quarters and utility rooms are contained in an annex at the north-west corner of the house which gives an irregular L-shaped footprint on the site.

***Architectural
Merit***

The site is served by a long uphill driveway off Lugard Road. The elegant ironwork entrance gates are flanked by low granite rubble walls and Classical ornamental pillars. The cut slope to the Lugard Road side of the driveway (Reg. No. 11 SW-A/CR702) features exposed rock, flourishing vegetation and mature trees. The other side of the driveway is flanked by a massive masonry retaining wall (Reg. No. 11SW-A/R1054) built of squared granite buttresses with planters in between. The upper part of the retaining

wall features an ornamental arch and simple concrete balustrading. At the top of the driveway, another pair of gates gives access to the small garden and a swimming pool. The north side of the site has a rubble retaining wall and the west side has a cut rock face finished with chunam. The hillside above the site is covered with thick afforestation on west side of the site.

The architectural style of the house is an elegant neo-classical style incorporating some Freestyle elements; the external of the house features painted rough cast rendered walls raised off rubble plinths and tall transomed casement windows. The front (east) elevation is dominated by elegant projecting verandahs in Italianate style, featuring segmental arches with a deep spandrel above, supported on slender Tuscan-style single or paired columns, and ornamental balustrading at first floor level. The south-side elevation features a wide bow window at ground floor level with a flat balcony roof above. Decorative stacco features include some Baroque elements, neo-classical mouldings and Tuscan-style capitals, a moulded string course at the first level, ornamental panels, and swags of vertical pendant drops. The edge of the roof has a wide eaves overhang with ornamental coupled supporting brackets.

Internally, the ground floor rooms are arranged around a central entrance hall which contains the main staircase. The Drawing Room and Breakfast Room have windows facing south to catch the morning sun. On the first floor, the two main bedrooms have sun rooms with windows facing south. The bedrooms are mostly en-suite with bathrooms and some have adjoining dressing rooms. All rooms are decorated in neo-classical style with moulded skirting, cornices, fireplace surrounds and paneled doors. The study room on the ground floor has hardwood paneling to the walls. All floors are boarded and varnished. The bathrooms and kitchens have been modernized. Glass or crystal chandeliers hang from the ceiling in the hall and over the main staircase.

In the early colonial days, the Peak was reserved for Europeans who built lavish houses on the slopes of the Peak. Most of the old houses have gone, and modern apartment blocks stand in their place today. This particular house is a rare example of a colonial hill residence built in the early 1910s.

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

The late Mr. Robert F. Luster who bought the house in 1977 attempted to restore the house to its original look. A parapet was added back to the roof and the steel window frames was replaced by teak. The banisters of the main staircase were replaced with wood taken from the old Hong Kong Club and an

old house in Kennedy Road. Three new chimneys were added and two old chimneys were still in use. The ceilings were lowered for incorporating concealed plumbing and central conditioning system. The floors and backstairs were also replaced.

The house has undergone conversions, renovations and interventions over the years to meet contemporary needs; however, it still retains much of its authentic external appearance and internal spatial quality and should be considered a piece of built heritage.

The historical past of No. 27 Lugard Road, and the fact that it is the first building after the first section of Lugard Road was built, give it a historic role and importance in the development of Hong Kong. Its association with historic figures such as Lennox Godfrey Bird and Herbert William Bird, and other owners / occupants such as Butterfield & Swire and the Finnie family also contribute to its local interest.

***Social Value
& Local
Interest***

Lugard Road, which encircles Victoria Peak and links with the Peak Tram station, is a popular walking path. A stroll around it offers breathtaking views over lush green tropical vegetation and stunning vistas of Hong Kong's famous harbour and distant islands. The graded buildings nearby include: Peak Lookout, a bungalow-style building (Grade 2), Peak Tramways Co. Ltd. at No. 1 Lugard Road (Grade 2), Victoria Gap Substation at No. 35 Lugard Road (Grade 3), No. 28 Lugard Road (Grade 3) and No. 34 Lugard Road (Grade 3). At a distance from Lugard Road, there are old Victoria Peak Radio Station (Grade 3), Chu Wan at No. 4 Mount Austin Road (Grade 3), Peak Depot at No. 102 Old Peak Road (Grade 2), Villa Blanca at No. 47 Barker Road (Grade 2), No. 8 Pollock's Path (Grade 2), No. 23 Coombe Road (Grade 1) and Former Gate Lodge (declared monument). Among them, No. 47 Barker Road (Grade 2) and No. 8 Pollock's Path (Grade 2) have been redeveloped, with only their facades retained.

Group Value

The house was proposed to be changed to a heritage hotel and was approved by the Town Planning Board in 2013 with conditions in submitting a conservation management plan and providing an information panel and free guided tours to introduce the building and the heritage trail, etc. The proposal was met with certain objections as Lugard Road is to this day too narrow for cars to pass for much of its length, and the cliff sides are too steep to build anything on. The site condition would seem to pose a challenge to any adaptation of the house to public use.

***Adaptive
Re-use***

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