

Historic Building Appraisal

“The Nest”

21 Ling Shan Road, Fanling, New Territories

Before the territory of Hong Kong was extended northwards to the Shenzhen River in 1898, Fanling was mainly inhabited by the Pang (彭) and Tang (鄧) clans.¹ The opening of the Kowloon-Canton Railway (KCR) in 1910 prompted an influx of investment in agriculture and Western sporting activities in the area.² Fanling soon became Hong Kong’s back garden, and a number of bungalows were erected in the area, including “The Nest”, which is believed to have been built in the 1930s.

**Historical
Interest**

“The Nest” is currently used as a residence for senior staff of the Customs and Excise Department (C&ED) under government land allocation number GLA-DN2. It was originally a private property located on lots 1945-49 and 4678 in DD51 before the government purchased them in 1947. The bungalow was referred to as “The Nest” in the document recording the acquisition of these six lots.

According to the available land records, lots 1945-49 were first owned by indigenous inhabitants surnamed Pang. The Block Government Lease of 1905 for the land indicates it was intended for “dry cultivation”, suggesting there were no buildings on the lots at that time. Lot 4678 (garden lot) was first gazetted for auction by the government only in May 1934. In 1938, the owner of the six lots

¹ Fanling has been inhabited at least since the Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279) when Pang Kwei (彭桂), the founding ancestor of the Pang clan, moved to Lung Shan (龍山, now known as Lung Yeuk Tau 龍躍頭) in Fanling. Later, descendants of the eldest son of Tang Wai-kap (鄧惟汲) of the Tang clan in Kam Tin also settled in Fanling, which prompted the Pang clan to move to the Lau Tsuen (樓村) area. The Tang family lived in Lung Shan, which developed into today’s “Five Wais (walled villages) and Six Tsuens (villages)” (五圍六村) in Lung Yeuk Tau. The Pangs relocated to what is now known as Fanling Wai (粉嶺圍) to build a walled village during the Wanli reign (1573-1620) of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644).

² A large number of fruit farms were established near Fanling Station in 1912 following investments by several Chinese entrepreneurs, including Sir Robert Ho Tung, who also planted lychees on an extensive area of farmland along the road from Fanling to San Tin. In 1914, the Botanical and Forestry Department opened the Fan Ling Experimental Garden in Fanling to cultivate crop plants. Jointly organised by local Chinese and foreigners, the first New Territories Agricultural Show was held at Ho Tung Gardens in Sheung Shui in 1927. The show then became an annual fixture (later at Shek Wu Hui market) until the Japanese occupation (1941-1945). The New Territories Agricultural Association was established in 1931; its headquarters in Fanling were later built with donations from the low-profile philanthropist J.E. Joseph.

In addition to agricultural developments, Fanling also attracted Western sports activities after the KCR opened: the Hong Kong Golf Club (established in 1889) acquired land west of Fanling to build a golf course in 1911, while in 1928 the Fanling Hunt and Race Club (registered in 1929 by a group of wealthy and privileged foreigners and disbanded in 1954) built a racecourse on military land east of Fanling for hunting and horse racing.

was recorded as Mrs. Rosie Weill. Although no documentary proof of the transactions between 1905 and 1938 could be found, old newspapers provide some clues here, including about the origin of the name “The Nest”.

In March 1934, a newspaper advertisement was published announcing that a fruit and vegetable shop named “The Nest” had opened on Peking Road, Kowloon, on 1 March 1934 selling “*Vegetables and Flowers grown at “THE NEST” Fanling, under European supervision.*”

Another newspaper advertisement that appeared in January 1935 stated that “*produce from The Nest, Sheung Shui, will only be distributed from the shop in Peking Road*” and that the business of “The Nest” on Peking Road had been taken over from Grace Ellis by John Russell, a member of the New Territories Agricultural Association, on 1 January 1935. As the shop on Peking Road and the farm in Fanling used the same name and as the advertisements state that produce from the farm was sold exclusively at the shop, it can reasonably be concluded that “The Nest” on Peking Road and “The Nest” in Fanling were owned by the same person, first Grace Ellis and later John Russell. The name “The Nest” last appeared in a directory in 1936, which suggests that John Russell might have sold it to Rosie Weill around or after 1936. Rosie Weill³ then sold the lot to Lionel Arthur Dabelstein for HK\$20,000 before the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong.⁴

The next owner, Lionel Arthur Dabelstein, was employed as a factory manager at the Organic Fertilizer Co., Ltd. at the time he purchased the site; he later worked at Green Island Cement Co., Ltd. Mr Dabelstein did not reside in the house for long: enlisted into the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps in 1940, he was captured by the Japanese upon the fall of Hong Kong on 25 December 1941 and imprisoned in Sham Shui Po Barracks as prisoner of war (POW) for the duration of the occupation. His wife, meanwhile, was sent to Stanley Internment Camp, where she died on 21 September 1944. Although

³ Mrs Rosie Weill was the widow of the French jewellery and watch merchant Albert Weill, who was the owner of the Alberose (Grade 2 historic building) on Pok Fu Lam Road. Their daughter Susie Weill married Alec Hutton Potts, who was a founding member of the Fanling Hunting and Jockey Club. The Hutton Potts family was heavily involved in hunting and horse racing activities in the Fanling area, and it is thought that the property might at one time have been used for recreation and hunting activities.

⁴ Because of the Japanese occupation, the sale was not recorded in the Land Registry’s Memorial (register of land deeds and instruments) until 1947. The entry states that \$20,000 was paid before the war, but does not specify an exact date of the sale. The juror list in the government’s Sessional Paper from 1940, however, notes that Mr Lionel Arthur Dabelstein, who originally lived in Waterloo Road, Kowloon (South China Morning Post, 5 June 1935), now resided in Fanling, which suggests that the lot was sold between 1938 and 1940.

the earliest aerial photo in which a vague image of a house situated at the lots concerned can first be seen was taken in 1945, the house should have been built before the war, as the owner of the lots was imprisoned in the POW camp for a long time and no construction work could be carried out during the occupation.

In August 1947, the Quartering Authority⁵ (宿舍編配局) wrote to Mr Dabelstein to enquire whether he was willing to sell his property “The Nest”, which comprised lots 1945-49 and 4678 in DD51, for HK\$50,000. He accepted the offer and officially transferred ownership of the lots one month later, with the site (including the building and the surrounding farmland) then becoming government property.

The government allocated the property to what was then called the Imports and Exports Department (出入口管理處) on 30 April 1948, which used it as accommodation for its revenue officers to make it easier for them to conduct their work to prevent smuggling along the border. The Imports and Exports Department was reorganised as the Commerce and Industry Department (工商業管理處) in 1949, and “The Nest” was later used as accommodation for the senior revenue inspector of Fanling Revenue Station, which was opened in 1951.

In 1977, the Preventive Service section (緝私隊) of the Commerce and Industry Department was renamed the C&ED, which became an independent department in 1982. “The Nest” currently serves as the accommodation of the head of Land Boundary Command of the C&ED (海關陸路邊境口岸科).

“The Nest” is a one-storey residential cottage surrounded by an open space. Although the building has a rather simple and functional form, it also includes some notable features, such as the external stucco walls and a rounded corner on its southwest elevation, which share similarities with the other private European residences, cottages and recreational clubs that were constructed around the same time in Hong Kong. Elements such as the concrete flat roofs and the chimneys are also commonly found in similar private European residential buildings from that era.

*Architectural
Merit*

The structure is believed to be built in reinforced concrete as well as drywall and brick infills. Internally, the walls of the premises are plastered with skirting

⁵ The Quartering Authority was established in 1946 with the primary main task of requisitioning European-style properties and allocating them to the government, military, navy, air force or citizens in need. At the same time, the authority regularly returned requisitioned properties that it held to the original owners. The work of the Quartering Authority was taken over by the Rating and Valuation Department from 1 September 1960.

with a wooden finish to match the wooden flooring. Two brick fireplaces painted white are installed in the living room and the dining room.

Despite its transfer to government ownership, “The Nest” has been maintained as a residential building. Later additions and alterations, both in the interior and at the exterior, were carried out to adapt the building to meet different accommodation needs. Based on the existing record plan, the entrance vestibule was enclosed to form the existing reception hall in the 1980s and the garage was extended after 2002. Modern building materials, such as the new glass roof erected over the entrance porch and aluminium windows, can also be seen. The authenticity of the building has thus been diminished to a certain extent.

***Authenticity &
Rarity***

“The Nest” is considered a typical example of private European residences in Hong Kong. Unlike other private buildings situated in the northern New Territories, which were often used as summer lodges or for recreational activities, “The Nest” in the rural area of Fanling is a mark of the relatively uncommon European business activities that were once pursued in the New Territories, where agricultural products are believed to have been produced and transported to Kowloon for sale.

The building has served as accommodation for government officials since the Second World War and, is not open for public access. “The Nest” therefore has limited social value in this regard.

***Social Value
& Local
Interest***

Together with Oi Yuen Villa, Kwu Tung (愛園別墅) (Grade1), Fanling Lodge, Kwu Tung (粉嶺別墅) (Grade 1), the Clubhouse (Grade 2) and Half-way House (Grade3) of the Hong Kong Golf Club Fanling Golf Course (粉嶺高爾夫球場會所及小食亭), Enchi Lodge Main Building and Ancillary Block (恩慈之家主樓及附屬建築物) (Grade 2) and Kam Tsin Lodge (金錢別墅) (Grade 2), “The Nest” is an example of how Fanling and other areas in the New Territories were regarded as Hong Kong’s back garden after the KCR opened in 1910, which provided some people from urban areas with an opportunity to expand their sources of livelihood to the northern area of the territory.

Group Value

In addition, the group value of “The Nest” is derived from its connection with the former Fanling Magistracy (前粉嶺裁判法院) (Grade 3), as they were both converted and constructed by the government to meet social and community needs after the Second World War.

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