

Historic Building Appraisal
Ex-Portuguese Community School (Escola Camões)
No. 7 Cox's Road, Tsim Sha Tsui, Kowloon

As the names inscribed at the entrance gateway and the main entrance doorway reveal, the existing building at No. 7 Cox's Road,¹ Tsim Sha Tsui (the "Building"), had once housed the Portuguese Community School (in English), which was also known as Escola Camões (in Portuguese, with "escola" meaning school). In Chinese, it was known as "葡僑公立學校" or "賈梅士學校". The school moved into the Building in 1954, with the then Governor Sir Alexander Grantham (葛量洪爵士) (1947 – 1957) officiating the opening ceremony, which was attended by Dr G. de Castilho, Portuguese Consul General in Hong Kong, on 29 June that year. **Historical Interest**

In fact, the history of the Building can be traced back to the early 1900s. It was built between 1902 and 1903, and can be identified on a map dated 1904. Situated on a plot of land marked as "Kowloon Inland Lot No. 1132" (or K.I.L. 1132), the Building was owned by George Murray Bain and William Nicholson.² Government records show that it was named Parkside (it adjoined King's Park) and used as a private residence until 1912, when a Deed of Surrender was entered into with the government, through which the government acquired the Building for \$60,000. Of this sum of \$60,000, \$46,682 was defrayed from railway funds, while the remainder came from Item No. 43, Public Works Extraordinary. The Building was then converted into the Manager's House of the Kowloon-Canton Railway (KCR). It continued to be called Parkside after the conversion. In 1928, the house was taken over from the railway department in order to accommodate the Kowloon Junior School, which was then operating in an ex-garrison school building at the nearby Gun Club Hill.³ Conversion works commenced in November 1928 and were completed around the end of the year. Those works mainly involved minor internal alterations, renovations, and the erection of a latrine block and covered way to form a playground. The school was relocated to Parkside in January 1929.⁴ It was

¹ It is said that Cox's Road was named after James Henry Cox (1831/1832 – 1904), who owned the leases on a number of the lots which ran the road. The lot "K.I.L. 1132" on which the Building was situated, and the nearby lots "K.I.L. 1133" and "K.I.L. 1134", for instance, were owned by J. H. Cox. Cox arrived in Hong Kong in 1861 to join the firm of Messrs. Turner and Co. as a bookkeeper. He had been a member of the Hong Kong Club since 1861 and dubbed one of the oldest members and the "Father" of the club. Cox was also a juror and appointed a Justice of the Peace in 1883. His name was in the Jury Lists for the years 1874, 1875 and 1879, for instance.

² George Murray Bain and William Nicholson were the executors of the will of James Henry Cox, who passed away in 1904. George Murray Bain (1842 – 1909) came to Hong Kong in 1864 as a printer. He worked as sub-editor of *The China Mail*. Later he became editor and then in 1875 sole owner of the paper. Bain passed away in 1909 and was buried in the Hong Kong Cemetery. William Nicholson (? – 1947) came to Hong Kong in 1896 to join Messrs Butterfield and Swire. He was an assistant of the firm when he owned the Building. For some years he had been the manager of the Taikoo Sugar Refinery. Nicholson retired from B. & S. in 1926 and lived in Dumbartonshire, Scotland, until passing away in 1947.

³ The Junior Kowloon School had 60 pupils when it was moved to Gun Club Hill in February 1921. The enrolment increased to 100 in 1927 and 99 in 1928. In 1938, the school was still one of the few primary schools the government provided for the European children in Hong Kong.

⁴ For eight years from February 1921, the Kowloon Junior School operated in an ex-garrison school building in Gun Club Hill. But in the autumn of 1928, the military authorities notified the school that it needed to take back the building in order to operate a

reported that the site was damaged during the Second World War, and the Building was described as a “looted shell”. In 1950, the school was relocated to the new premises at another site.

The Building was then unoccupied until 1954 when it became the new home of the Portuguese Community School. The school, financed by the Portuguese Consulate, was established in 1948 and named Escola Camões, with the aim of promoting the study of the mother tongue among the young generation of the local Portuguese community. Named after Luís de Camões, a 16th-century poet who is to Portuguese what William Shakespeare is to English,⁵ from 1949 the school was housed by the Club de Recreio (西洋波會) (Grade 3) at No. 20 Gascoigne Road, where kindergarten and Primary I to Primary III classes were organized. The school had just 15 students at that time. The name was later changed to the Portuguese Community School. In 1951, in response to an increase in the number of students from 15 to 100, Mr. Menezes Ribeiro, then Acting Consul for Portugal, discussed with some Portuguese community leaders the construction of permanent premises. An application to redevelop the site at No. 7 Cox’s Road was thus made. Finally, however, it was considered more economical to rehabilitate the Building rather than demolish and rebuild it. Subsequently in 1954, following the extensive rehabilitation and alteration to the pre-war premises, the Building became the new home of the Portuguese Community School, also known as Escola Camões.

The rehabilitated Building could accommodate some 280 students ranging from kindergarten to Primary IV. The school was co-educational and English was the medium of instruction, while Portuguese was taught as a second language. In 1954, the Board of Governors (總理團) of the Portuguese Community Education and Welfare Foundation (referred to as the “Foundation” hereafter) (葡僑教育及福利基金) was incorporated under the Portuguese Community Education and Welfare Foundation Incorporation Ordinance (葡僑教育及福利基金法團條例) (Cap. 1071). It took over the operation of the school upon being granted the Cox’s Road site. The school also received subsidies from the government from then on.

Among the early students of the school was Gabriel Dias Azedo, who was the President of Club Lusitano in Hong Kong (2002 – 2008), and a member of the Board of Governors of the Portuguese Community Education and Welfare Foundation Incorporated in the 2000s.

garrison school.

⁵ Luís de Camões was a great poet to the Portuguese. For instance, a gathering was organized at Club de Recreio in memory of Camões on 9 June 1948. A professor from The University of Hong Kong delivered a lecture entitled “Poet Camões” (賈梅士詩人).

In January 1997, the foundation surrendered the school premises to the government, since many Portuguese in Hong Kong had emigrated. Then from 1997 to 2012, a local social and charitable organization, Po Leung Kuk (保良局), ran a primary school there, which was once known as Po Leung Kuk Portuguese Community School (保良局賈梅士學校), although admission was open to all nationalities. In 2012, the school was relocated, and the name “Portuguese Community School” or “賈梅士學校” was also abandoned.

Built on an elevated platform and surrounded by brick fence walls, the Building is accessible through a flight of steps from Cox’s Road. The conversion of the Building to the Kowloon Junior School in 1928 mainly involved minor alterations to the interior, renovations, construction of a latrine block and the addition of a covered way to form a playground. The photos and ground floor plan of the Kowloon Junior School before the conversion show that the main building had two storeys and a basement. The entrance with a staircase was in the south-west corner of the Building. Verandahs, which ran almost continuously along all the elevations, except a middle portion on the north elevation, were formed by arcades with classical features, including moulded architraves, keystones, moulded column capitals and bases, balustrades, stringcourses and cornices. Internally, the ground floor contained three main rooms, each fitted with a fireplace. The main staircase gave access to the upper floor.

Architectural Merit

The Building underwent major alterations during the conversion to the Portuguese Community School, for which A. V. Alvares (Alfred Victor Jorge Alvares) (1910 - 1992) was the architect.⁶ The overall design of the Building was much modernized. Externally, the old entrance in the south-west corner at the basement level was removed. Instead, a new main entrance was created in the middle of the east facade, whose design was highlighted by a pair of trapezoidal features finished with coursed rubble masonry with a canopy atop. The parapet above the canopy was inscribed with the school name “ESCOLA CAMÕES”. Behind it are three flagpoles. A secondary entrance and an exit were respectively located at the north and west elevations. Besides, the verandahs were enclosed by steel windows and most of the classical features were removed, with the architraves (with the keystones removed) on the top floor being the only classical features still identifiable after the conversion. The architraves were finished with Shanghai plaster, whose use extended all the way down to the ground floor. The exterior walls at the ground and first floor levels were finished with roughcast plaster, whereas those at the basement level were cement finished and decorated with groove lines. The tapered pilasters

⁶ A. V. Alvares was a Portuguese born in Macau in 1910. He designed luxury apartments, and was the President of the Hong Kong Institute of Architects in 1968.

on the exterior of the basement are also of some architectural interest. In addition, a new reinforced concrete staircase for use as a fire escape was added at the north-east corner of the Building.

Internally, both the main and secondary entrances at the basement level led to the entrance hall and the main staircase. On the left-hand side of the entrance hall was a doctor's room connected to a waiting room and a covered playground, while on its right was a teacher's room. The exit at the west elevation gave access to a kitchen, a pantry and a dining room. The main staircase has a concrete parapet with moulded and stepped coping. New reinforced concrete floor and roof slabs were added. The enclosed verandahs on the ground and first floors became classrooms, lavatories and store rooms. The previous three main rooms (then the classrooms) on the ground floor, for instance, were thus enlarged after the enclosure of the verandah. The headmaster's quarters connected to his office and a bathroom were located in the enclosed verandah in the south-west corner of the first floor. The interiors were also modernized.

It is not easy to see the Building, as the view of it has been obstructed by its surrounding residential high-rises. Nonetheless, it survives as a historical reminder of the Portuguese community in Hong Kong. The Portuguese came from Macau seeking better opportunities in Hong Kong soon after it was made a British colony and was opened to foreign trade.⁷ The newcomers mainly resided in the Mid-levels. But the growth of the Portuguese population slackened from the early 1900s onwards, when many business and job opportunities had gone to the British who greatly outnumbered the Portuguese.⁸ Also the period from the early 1900s onwards marked the beginning of the Portuguese living in Kowloon, primarily in Tsim Sha Tsui.⁹ Since Portugal was a neutral state in the Second World War, the Hong Kong Portuguese were not interned by the Japanese, apart from those who had served with the British forces. But in fact, several hundred members of the

*Social Value
& Local
Interest*

⁷ That emigration tide was more apparent from the 1850s onwards due to declining economic prospects and the social and political unrests in Macau. The newcomers mainly resided at the Mid-levels, such as Caine Road (堅道), Shelley Street (些利街), Peel Street (卑利街) and Chancery Lane (贊善里). The vast majority of those Portuguese were employed as interpreters, clerks and bookkeepers in the Hong Kong government or European banks, trading companies and other expatriate institutions. They were deemed suitable for these roles because of their ability to speak Cantonese and English, as many of them had attended Catholic mission schools in Macau. A small number became merchants or businessmen, or some others joined the colonial military services.

⁸ Some of the census figures of the British and the Portuguese populations in Hong Kong are set out below:
Year 1871 – 1,367 Portuguese and 869 British;
Year 1891 – 2,089 Portuguese and 1,448 British;
Year 1901 – 1,956 Portuguese and 3,007 British;
Year 1911 – 2,558 Portuguese and 3,761 British;
Year 1921 – 2,609 Portuguese and 7,889 British; and
Year 1931 – 3,198 Portuguese and 14,366 British, both including military men.

⁹ Also from the early 1900s onwards was the beginning of the Portuguese living in Kowloon, primarily Austin Road (柯士甸道), Granville Road (加連威老道), Ashley Road (亞士厘道), Knutsford Terrace (諾士佛臺) and Kimberley Road (金巴利道) in Tsim Sha Tsui.

Portuguese community had taken refuge to neutral Macau etc. by the summer of 1942. Some left Hong Kong permanently after the war, and emigrated overseas.¹⁰

Nowadays, the Building is one of the few surviving historic buildings having direct connections with the Portuguese community in Hong Kong. Other examples include Rosary Church on Chatham Road South (玫瑰堂) (Grade 1), St. Teresa's Church on Prince Edward Road West (聖德肋撒堂) (Grade 1) and Club de Recreio (西洋波會) (Grade 3).

The Building is within walking distance from other historic buildings, including the former Kowloon British School (前九龍英童學校) (Declared Monument), St. Mary's Canossian College (嘉諾撒聖瑪利書院) (Grade 1), Kowloon Cricket Club (九龍木球會) (Grade 2) and Kowloon Bowling Green Club (九龍草地滾球會) (Grade 3) **Group Value**

The Building underwent major alterations in the 1950s, during which most of the classical features were stripped out. What we see today is largely the rehabilitated premises of the 1950s. The interior had also been altered to suit the new use. Despite that, the Building is historically and socially significant. Originally built as a private residence, it later became the Manager's House of KCR. It was then adapted as a primary school for European children for two decades from 1929 to 1950. Later, for four decades from 1954 to 1997, it served as the primary school for Portuguese. It is also one of the few surviving historic buildings associated with the Portuguese community in Hong Kong. **Rarity, Built Heritage Value & Authenticity**

¹⁰ They emigrated to countries like the US, Australia, Brazil, Canada and New Zealand, due to the social instabilities (mainly riots) in Hong Kong and the declining economic prospects for the Portuguese. It is now difficult to know the number of Portuguese in Hong Kong, as Portuguese are not specified in the census of population by nationality.

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