

Historic Building Appraisal

No. 120 Wellington Street, Central, Hong Kong

Wellington Street was named after Duke of Wellington (1769 – 1852), British Prime Minister 1828-30.¹ The land, on which the building at No. 120 Wellington Street is situated, formed part of a larger plot “IL No. 173”, which was first sold under a government lease at public auction in 1844. Three houses were built on IL No. 173 and their addresses underwent several changes in the late nineteenth century, i.e. before 1883, as Nos. 66, 68 and 70 Wellington Street; in 1883, renumbered as Nos. 100, 102 and 104; and in 1887 further renumbered as Nos. 116, 118 and 120 respectively. *Historic Interest*

In 1858, Thomas Ash Lane and Ninian Crawford (founders of Lane, Crawford & Co.)² bought the three houses.³ On Christmas 1878, a great fire broke out in Central. It entirely swept away “Cochrane Street, Gutzlaff Street, Graham Street... and portions of Stanley Street, Wellington Street, Gage Street, Lyndhurst Terrace and Hollywood Road” (*The China Mail*, 26 December 1878), making the area “a mass of tottering walls and crumbling ruins”. The whole blocks of houses at Nos. 66, 68 and 70 (No. 120 since 1887) were described as “Burnt 25/26 Dec 78” in the Rates Book for 1879 and were exempted from payment of rates for the whole year of 1879.

In 1879, the whole IL 173 site was bought by Ho Chung-shang and Ho U-shang. In 1880, rates collection for the three houses, i.e. Nos. 66, 68 and 70 (No. 120 since 1887) Wellington Street was resumed;⁴ moreover, an additional house was erected at the rear of the site (No. 2E Graham Street, which formed the remainder of IL173) in the same year. In 1881, Nos. 66, 68 and 70 were purchased by the same owner, while No. 2E Graham Street was sold separately.

¹ Duke of Wellington was remembered as a war hero and conqueror due to his role as the commanding officer at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815 when Napoleon, Emperor of France, was defeated.

² Lane, Crawford & Co., now Lane Crawford Ltd., is one of the oldest department stores in Hong Kong. It was established in Hong Kong in 1850 by Thomas Ash Lane, reputed as a Scottish master of sailing ship trading in China from 1848, and Ninian Crawford, a London merchant. Lane, Crawford & Co. was first set up as ships' chandler and store-keeper. It began to evolve into a department store in the 1890s.

³ According to the Land Registry records, the three houses were bought by Thomas Ash Lane and Ninian Crawford, founders of Lane, Crawford & Co., in 1858. The three houses were later owned by Ninian Crawford, John Wingate MC Laren and William Frederick Lewis in 1871. According to Rates Books, however, the three houses were simply described as owned by Lane, Crawford & Co until 1879.

⁴ Rates were collected for No. 70 Wellington Street in 1880, but without occupant. It was not until 1881 that No. 70 was occupied by Chan Nam Watches.

In 1882, the ownership of Nos. 66, 68 and 70 became divided: No. 66 was sold to Li Aki, whereas Nos. 68 and 70 were sold to Chan A-lam and Lam Mi-kin. According to land records, Chan A-lam owned Nos. 68 and 70 until 1903. During that period of time, a gold and silversmith shop “Chan Nam” was housed at No. 70 (renumbered No. 104 in 1883 and then No. 120 in 1887).⁵

From a photo taken near the junction of Graham and Wellington Streets in 1894⁶, it shows a signboard with “Chan Nam Gold and Silver Smith, Watch Maker & Engraver 鎮南” at the side elevation (facing Graham Street) of the building at No. 120 Wellington Street. It also shows that the building had an L-shaped metal balcony on the second floor running through the elevations facing Wellington Street and Graham Street. Another photo taken at the same location in 1906 depicting the corner of the building at the junction of Graham and Wellington Streets from the ground floor to the roof⁷ shows not only the L-shaped balcony on the second floor (demolished), but also the pitched tiled roof (still remains). Traces of the fixing of the metal balcony and the windows of the building are still identifiable today.

From 1939 until 2008, a Lee family owned the premises until it was finally acquired by Urban Renewal Authority as part of a proposed redevelopment scheme. Wing Woo Grocery Shop (永和海味雜貨), which occupied the ground floor of No. 120 Wellington Street, was established by Kwan Kam-ming around the 1930s and continued as a grocery shop until 2009 (apart from the Japanese Occupation (1941 – 1945) when it was taken over by the Japanese and used as a salt and sugar depot).⁸ It has been vacant since 2009.

The building is a typical example of Hong Kong shophouse (*Tong Lau*) *Architectural*

⁵ The history of this gold and silversmith can be traced back to the year 1876 when it was recorded in the Rates Book that “Chai Nam, S. Smith” was the occupant and Lane Crawford & Co. the owner of the present No. 120 Wellington Street. The shop was re-opened in around 1881 after the building was reconstructed after the fire. Rates records for the years 1896/97 to 1904/05 are missing.

⁶ The photo was taken in about 1894 after the outbreak of the bubonic plague. It captures a team of plague inspectors in white uniforms. Source of photo: Wue, Roberta. *Picturing Hong Kong: photography 1855-1910*, New York, N.Y.: Asia Society Galleries in association with South China Printing Company, Hong Kong, 1997, p. 89.

⁷ Chui, Jack and Wing Woo Concern Group, ‘120 Wellington Street, Former Wing Woo Grocery Shop: A Historic Building Appraisal and Recommendations’, Revision 1 on 2 March 2017, p. 3-4. The photo dated 1906 featuring on page 4 is from Mr KO Tim-keung as acknowledged by author.

⁸ Tong, Wai-yan, Christine, ‘Documenting the historical and spatial significance of Wing Woo grocery and provisional shop’, Thesis (M. Sc), The University of Hong Kong, 2008, p. 9.

of early period. It is 3-storey high with a narrow frontage to Wellington Street and was a corner building. Its main walls were built of grey bricks and rendered in lime plaster. It has a pitched double pan-and-roll tiled roof as main roof with a small flat concrete roof at the rear. An access with steps for maintenance is still retained on the tiled roof, which is rarely found in urban areas nowadays. The building originally had projecting cantilevered balconies on the first and second floors but they were demolished. Its elevation facing Wellington Street has two tall windows with semi-circular arches and fanlights on each of the first and second floors. There was an access to the upper floors from the entrance on the side facing Graham Street. The old folding steel shutter of the grocery shop still remains on the ground floor. *Merit*

Internally, the building housed Wing Woo Grocery Shop on the ground floor with a cockloft for storing merchandise and a kitchen at the rear part. No toilet accommodation was provided. The floors of the upper storeys were built of timber boarding which was laid on to square timber joists (with some older round fir joists still remain). Cement floor tiles⁹ of simple floral patterns still exist on the first and second floors. The battens, purlins and underside of the tiles of the pitched roof still remain. The first and second floors were leased out separately for use as family living accommodation, which could be accessed directly from the ground floor on Graham Street by a flight of wooden stairs which were flanked by brick wall on the one side and wooden panels on the other. Since 2008, both the exterior and interior of the building had been supporting by heavy steel shoring.

No. 120 Wellington Street is now probably one of the oldest surviving examples of early Hong Kong shophouses, approximately built between 1880 and 1894. It bears witness to the bubonic plague which broke out in 1894 and provides evidence to illustrate the way of living of common Chinese people. Its exterior had been altered by the demolition of the projecting balconies at the first and second floors. Internally, there were no major alterations apart from repairs. *Rarity, Built Heritage Value & Authenticity*

The building holds considerable social value, particularly amongst its immediate neighbourhood, mainly due to the well-known grocery shop, Wing *Social Value & Local Interest*

⁹ The cement floor tiles in the building were always mistakenly referred as ceramic floor tiles. Cement floor tiles are made by coloured cement pressed in a mould under great pressure. No firing is required.

Woo Grocery Shop where people purchased daily commodities as well as to socialise there. No. 120 Wellington Street had been a local land mark and a rare example of typical *Tong Lau* of the late nineteenth century. The building also illustrates the history of a typical early local grocery business: from its creation, through the Japanese Occupation, to its prosperous times in the 1960s, then to the era with competitions from supermarkets since the 1980s, until its eventual closure in 2009.

This building has lost some of its former group value due to the re-development of its adjoining areas, leaving it a unique example of old *Tong Lau* in the area. Nevertheless, it still shares a common heritage grouping with other shophouses nearby, namely No. 99F Wellington Street (Proposed Grade 2), and Nos. 123, 125 and 127 Wellington Street (all proposed Grade 1). It is also within walking distance of the former Central Police Station Compound, Central Magistracy and Victoria Prison (Declared Monuments) and No. 20 Hollywood Road (Grade 3). ***Group Value***

REFERENCES

Document Records at The Land Registry Office, Hong Kong

Property Particulars of Inland Lot No. 173

Property Particular of The Remaining Portion of Inland Lot No. 173.

Property Particulars of The Remaining Portion of Section A of Inland Lot No. 173.

Property Particulars of Sub-Section 1 of Section A of Inland Lot No. 173.

Archives at Public Records Office, Hong Kong

HKRS 38–2, *Rates Assessment, Valuation and Collection Books*, 1876 – 1895/96.

Card number 00091867, Carl Smith Collection.

Card number 00091859, Carl Smith Collection.

Printed Documents of the Hong Kong Government

Hong Kong Government Gazettes, 1883 and 1887, Hong Kong: Noronha & Co.

Books, Articles and Other Sources

Bard, Solomon. *Traders of Hong Kong: some foreign merchant houses, 1841 – 1899*, Hong Kong: Urban Council, 1993, pp.69 – 70.

Chui, Jack and Wing Woo Concern Group. “120 Wellington Street, Former Wing Woo Grocery Shop: A Historic Building Appraisal and Recommendations”, Revision 1 on 2 March 2017.

Tong, Wai-yan, Christine. ‘Documenting the historical and spatial significance of Wing Woo grocery and provisional shop’, Thesis (M. Sc), The University of Hong Kong, 2008.

Wordie, Jason. *Streets, Exploring Hong Kong Island*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2002.

Wue, Roberta. *Picturing Hong Kong: photography 1855-1910*, New York, N.Y.: Asia Society Galleries in association with South China Printing Company, Hong Kong, 1997.

British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). ‘The Duke of Wellington: Forging the Iron Duke’ <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/timelines/zxjw7ty>>, accessed on 21 April 2017.

Leisure and Cultural Services Department. ‘Wing Wo Grocery Store’ in the collection “Memories We Share: Hong Kong in the 1960s and 1970s” of Hong Kong Memory <http://www.hkmemory.hk/collections/MemoriesWeShare/All_Items/images/201508/t20150825_76032.html>, accessed on 22 April 2017.

v-artist. 「[物.流.愛]-永和老舖第一集」, from “YouTube” <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zkoJzpclZPs>>, uploaded on 17 October 2008, accessed on 22 April 2017.

v-artist. 「[物.流.愛]-永和老舖第二集」, from “YouTube”

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5REMDr19HS8>>, uploaded on 1 November 2011, accessed on 22 April 2017.

v-artist. 「[物.流.愛]-永和老舖第三集」, from “YouTube”

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bjKseYZsxAU>>, uploaded on 9 November 2008, accessed on 22 April 2017.

蘋果動新聞, 「永和號告別嘉咸街, 顧客趕幫襯」 from “YouTube”

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dp1wyKu3IFU>>, accessed on 22 April 2017.

Community TV. 「永和的最後今天」 from “YouTube”

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z37zuxQxQ9o>>, accessed on 22 April 2017.

「80年老店永和號結業」, 《蘋果日報》 dated 25 January 2009, from

<<http://hk.apple.nextmedia.com/news/art/20090125/12132570>>, accessed on 22 April 2017.

「展覽活動: 細說永和雜貨店故事」, 《東方日報》 dated 16 June 2009, from

<http://orientaldaily.on.cc/cnt/lifestyle/20090616/00298_006.html>, accessed on 22 April 2017.