

Historic Building Appraisal

Barker Road Peak Tram Station, The Peak, H.K.

The Peak Tram has been in operation since 1888, with Barker Road Peak Tram Station (白加道山頂纜車站), also known as Barker Road Station, as one of the intermediate stations between the lower terminus on Garden Road and the upper one on the Peak. Built in 1919, Barker Road Station is the oldest surviving Peak Tram station building in Hong Kong. *Historical Interest*

Hong Kong has a sub-tropical climate. In the time before electric fans and air-conditioning were invented, the Peak offered cooler temperatures and fresh sea breezes, and was therefore a desirable place for Europeans to escape the heat of the city during the summer months. This advantage of the Peak was recognised back in 1849, when the Colonial Surgeon, William T. Morrison, proposed to build a military sanatorium on the Peak. It was not until 1862 that the sanatorium was opened, but it was not a success. The disused sanatorium was then leased by Granville Sharp (1824 – 1899). Around 1867, the government took back the site and converted the sanatorium into the summer residence of Governor Sir Richard MacDonnell (1866 – 1872) which, in return, encouraged some other wealthy residents to follow suit and build their summer houses on the Peak. In 1877, Governor Sir John Pope Hennessy (1877 – 1882) permitted the Chinese community to construct tenement houses in the Central District. That had encouraged more wealthy residents to move to the Mid-levels and the Peak. But sedan chairs were then the only means of transport between the Peak and the city.

The population of the Peak was boosted by the opening of the Peak Tram in 1888. Back in 1881, a Scotsman named Alexander Findlay Smith (1845 – 1926), who was a former employee of Scotland's Highland Railways, presented a petition to Governor Hennessy for the development of a tram system connecting Murray Barracks in Central to Victoria Gap on the Peak.¹ Construction commenced in September 1885. It took three years to build, as much of the heavy equipment and rails had to be hauled uphill by sheer manpower. On 28 May 1888, the Peak Tram was officially opened by Governor Sir William Des Voeux (1887 – 1891), and on the following day a free trip was afforded to members of the public. On 30 May 1888, the tramway was opened for regular traffic. It was the first funicular railway in Asia.

There are four intermediate stations between the lower and upper terminals, namely Kennedy Road (堅尼地道), MacDonnell Road (麥當勞道), May Road (梅道) and

¹ Alexander Findlay Smith established the Peak Hotel near the upper terminal of the Peak Tram. The hotel was opened at about the same time as the tramway. Findlay Path (芬梨徑), with an end near Barker Road Station, was named after him.

Barker Road (白加道) Stations, from Central to the Peak.² The existing canopies of the first three stations were constructed in 2008, with concrete steps and platforms. Regarding Barker Road Station, it was originally named Plantation Road Station. In 1898, Barker Road leading from Magazine Gap (馬己仙峽) to Plantation Road (種植道) was completed.³ According to the historical photos and records dating from 1901 to 1938, the station, which is situated at the junction of Barker Road and Plantation Road, was at times known as Plantation Road Station, Barker Road Station, or even Barker and Planation Road Station. Historical photos show that the station building was built of brickwork. It was situated on the hillside opposite Plantation Road and did not straddle the railway. In 1918, building plans for a new station building, which would roof over the station itself, were prepared by Messrs. Leigh & Orange. Its design was aimed at increasing the accommodation for sedan chairs and rickshaws, while also providing a small shelter for coolies. According to government records, a new Barker Road Station was built in 1919 and completed in the same year. It can be identified on a map of 1922 and was also captured in a photo taken in 1935, for instance.

During the Japanese Occupation (1941 – 1945), the Japanese cut down fir trees on the Peak. The Peak Tram railway was used to transport logs down to Garden Road, where they were collected and transported to the Hong Kong Electric Power Station for use as fuel. After repairs, the funicular service resumed operation on Christmas Day 1945.

The historic building structure of Barker Road Station is composed of the main station building flanked by an annex and a walkway extension, while the design bears classical and Art Deco influences. Built on massive masonry buttresses, the station building has a squarish flat concrete slab roof that extends over a colonnaded, balustraded platform and the tramway track. It also has roof overhangs that are supported on cantilevered brackets at the hillside. The surfaces of the beams are articulated with recessed geometric forms. They are echoed by the relief ornamentation at the top of the chamfered columns, as well as the relief surround and tiered-keystones over the arched openings. Besides, the station building has a cantilevered canopy on the Barker Road side, which is believed to have been originally designed as a coolie shelter for sedan chair and rickshaw bearers. The square chamfered columns with massive footings are articulated in such a way that ornamental arches with keystones are created. The three semi-circular fanlights on the Barker Road side of the station are arches formed by the columns abutting the road. They provide a view of the tracks. According to a photo dating from around 1933, the arches

***Architectural
Merit***

² May Road was constructed and named as such in 1907.

³ The road was named after Major-General George Digby Barker, who was Commander of Her Majesty's Forces in China and Hong Kong between 1890 and 1895.

were fitted with railings. The existing ornamental ironwork with a radiating tracery-like pattern was installed in 2008, whereas the bollards were erected in the 2010s.

Beside the main station building is an annex, which is used for the storage of tools. A photo dated around 1933 shows a wall with timber windows, which provided visual access to the tracks under the roof of the station building. Those windows have now been replaced with glass blocks. Another photo dating from about 1935 shows two timber windows on the outer side of the annex, but they have now been blocked. The walls in the interior are decorated with curved and circular motifs. Near the annex today is a surviving pillar featuring classical designs in relief, which is also identifiable at the cantilevered canopy on the Barker Road side of the station.

The walkway extension at the west end of the platform takes visitors to Barker Road, Plantation Road and Old Peak Road. This structure is built of red brickwork laid in English bond with raised “ribbon pointing”. It is partly sheltered by a flat concrete roof and is bounded by a balustrade wall on the north side. The westernmost part of the extension is sheltered by a pitched roof with two rectangular openings for ventilation purposes.

Originally built to serve the Peak’s residents, the Peak Tram is now mainly used by tourists and sightseers. It remains one of Hong Kong’s enduring favourites. Throughout its long history, the Peak Tram has remained one of the most visited and photographed sights in Hong Kong, because it not only offers an enviable view over the harbour, but also a quiet respite from the city below. The Barker Road Station, which features classical and Art Deco influences, is a hotspot for morning walkers, visitors and photography lovers.

***Social Value
& Local
Interest***

The station is within walking distance from other historic buildings, including Peak Tramways Co. Ltd. (山頂纜車有限公司) at No. 1 Lugard Road (盧吉道) and the Old Peak Café (舊山頂餐廳) (both Grade 2), and the Gate Lodge of the Former Mountain Lodge (舊總督山頂別墅守衛室, Declared Monument).

Group Value

Barker Road Station is the oldest surviving Peak Tram station building in Hong Kong, and has considerable built heritage value. The main station building, annex and walkway extension have changed little with the passage of time. Although there have been some alterations over the years, they have not undermined the authenticity of the building’s historic fabric.

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

REFERENCES

Archives at Public Records Office, Hong Kong

Card No. CS/I009/0083678, Carl Smith Collection.

HKRS207-12-21. *Map of Peak District, Hong Kong (c.a. 1888) (Map No. 21).*

HKRS58-1-5-54. *Proposed New Road to join Plantation Road and Magazine Gap Road respecting Exchange of Land with the Crown Lessee of R.B. Lot 1.*

Photograph Ref. 02-06-130. *Peak from Barker Road, c. 1938.*

Photograph Ref. 08-13-035. *Peak Tramway and Victoria Gap viewed from below Barker Road, 1912-1919.*

Hong Kong Government Reports

Government Notification No. 490 dated 2 November 1898, *The Hongkong Government Gazette*, 5 November 1898, from Hong Kong Government Reports Online.

Government Notification No. 672, dated 9 November 1901, *The Hongkong Government Gazette*, 1901, from Hong Kong Government Reports Online.

Hong Kong Administrative Reports, 1918, from Hong Kong Government Reports Online.

Hong Kong Administrative Reports, 1919, from Hong Kong Government Reports Online.

Hongkong Blue Book, 1919, from Hong Kong Government Reports Online.

Maps of the Hong Kong Government

Crown Lands and Survey Office, P.W.D. Historical map of 1922 (Map Ref. No. 163-NW-5).

Newspapers

“Supreme Court: The Peak Tramway Case”, *South China Morning Post*, 13 March 1906.

“Correspondence: The Peak Tramway”, *South China Morning Post*, 24 July 1908.

“Peak Patron’s Complaint”, *South China Morning Post*, 2 June 1909.

“Obituary, Mr. Alexander Findlay Smith, Late Peak Hotel Proprietor”, *The China Mail*, 12 January 1926.

Books, Articles and Other Sources

Arnold, John. *Hong Kong's Famous Funicular: the Peak Tramway, 1888-1978* (Hong Kong: Peak Tramways Co. Ltd., 1978).

Endacott, G. B. *A History of Hong Kong*, (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1973).

Shepherd, Bruce. *The Hong Kong Guide, 1893* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1982).

《美丽的香港》(香港：星島報業，1973)。

“Ascent to the Peak - Our Peak Tramways Collection”, *The Hong Kong Heritage Project*, <<https://www.hongkongheritage.org/Pages/post.aspx?post=2m>>, accessed on 28 October 2020.

Hong Kong Museum of History. Photograph Ref. P1969.0076. *Peak Tramways Track, near the Peak, Hong Kong Island, c. 1920s.*

Hong Kong Museum of History. Photograph Ref. MHP1997.1751. *Hong Kong Peak Tramway in 1909.*