

Historic Building Appraisal

Steps of Pound Lane

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The Chinese community, mainly comprising the newcomers from the mainland, was first established on the northern part of Hong Kong Island along the coast in the early 1840s, with settlements concentrated in the Upper, Middle and Lower Bazaars. The main business centre near the coast was called Lower Bazaar (下市場), within which the main street was today's Jervois Street (蘇杭街) in Sheung Wan. The Upper Bazaar (上市場) was located on the hillside at the back of the Lower Bazaar, and was generally referred to as Taipingshan (太平山). The main streets of the Upper Bazaar were approximately where the present-day Lower and Upper Lascar Rows (上摩囉街)(下摩囉街) are situated. The Middle Bazaar (中市場) was an area including today's Peel (卑利街), Graham (嘉咸街), Gutzlaff (吉士笠街), Cochrane (閣麟街), Gage (結志街) and Gough Streets (歌賦街) in Central. At the foot of this area were some marine lots.

*Historical
Interest*

The Middle Bazaar was located very close to the areas inhabited by Europeans. In view of the cultural differences between the Chinese and European communities and the undesirable hygienic condition of the Chinese tenements, the government carried out a segregation policy and relocated the Chinese residents of the Middle Bazaar to the Taipingshan area crossed by Lower Lascar Row (下摩囉街), Hollywood Road (荷里活道) and Taipingshan Street (now known as Tai Ping Shan Street) (太平山街). By September 1844, all the old structures in the Middle Bazaar had been removed. Subsequently, all the places to the east of Aberdeen Street (鴨巴甸街) were inhabited by Europeans. This situation prolonged until the rise of wealthy Chinese merchants in the 1860s.

In 1857, the City of Victoria was composed of seven districts, among which was the Taipingshan district, and by 1911, it had been developed to ten.¹ According to government records, it was lawful for the Governor in Council from time to time to alter the boundary of any district. For the sake of clarity, in 1911, the boundaries of the ten districts of the City of Victoria were set out in a map under the Regulation of Chinese Ordinance. Accordingly, "District No. 4 Taipingshan" was bounded by the then Queen's Road (today's Queen's Road

¹ According to the government records of 1857, the seven districts were Sei Ying Poon, Sheong Wan, Tai Ping Shan, Choong Wan, Ha Wan, Wong Nei Choong and Soo Koan Poo. By 1911, three more districts, namely the Kennedy Town, Shek Tong Tsui and Wan Chai districts, had been established.

Central, 皇后大道中) and Gough Street (歌賦街) to the north, the Mid-levels beyond Conduit Road (干德道) to the south, Aberdeen Street (鴨巴甸街) and Seymour Road (西摩道) to the east and Po Yan Street (普慶街) to the west. The flight of steps of Pound Lane (磅巷) is situated in the Taipingshan district.

According to the records available, Pound Lane is believed to have existed by 1863, as the name “Pound Lane” was first identifiable from a map of the year 1863 and later 1867.² By 1887, Pound Lane only ended at its intersection with Rutter Street at that time according to a contemporary map. It was extended to Hospital Road between 1892 and 1897.³ By then the lane had reached its final length as we see today, with its lower and upper ends respectively intersected by Hollywood Road near Possession Street (水坑口街) and Hospital Road (醫院道) near No. 4 Hospital Road (Grade 2). Along the way, Pound Lane is also intersected, from the lower to upper sections, by Tai Ping Shan Street (or Taipingshan Street in the old days, 太平山街), Po Yee Street (普義街), Po Hing Fong (普慶坊) and Rutter Street (律打街). However, the lowest section between Hollywood Road and Tai Ping Shan Street only provided vehicular access and thus was not built with steps. According to a map between 1894 and 1895, the flight of steps started at the junction of the lane and Taipingshan Street (or Tai Ping Shan Street now) where the present Pound Lane Public Toilet and Bathhouse (磅巷公廁及浴室, first built in 1904 and rebuilt in 1961) is situated.

It was believed, according to an old newspaper of 1933, that the English name of “Pound Lane” derived from the existence of a Government pound, or place where strayed cattle and so forth, or animals due for quarantine or confiscation, were kept. Regarding the name “磅巷” in Chinese, it is said that the English pronunciation of “pound” sounds similar to the pronunciation of “磅” in Cantonese, while “巷” is lane in Chinese.

Apart from the Government pound, it is also noteworthy that animals such as pigs, cows and goats were raised in the buildings at Pound Lane and its vicinity. “Cattle”, “cowkeeper”, “goatherd”, etc. can be identified from the rates records between 1865 and 1885, for instance. Those animals were

² No gazette record is available from government records.

³ The plot of land bounded by Rutter Street and Hospital Road was vacant, according to a map of 1887. It was not until 1892 that the first land lease for development of the site (Inland Lot No. 1221) was made. Two rows of building had been constructed by 1897, according to a map that year. The site is known as Wing Wa Terrace (榮華臺) at present.

accommodated in shops, dwelling houses or shop-cum-dwelling houses. In April 1874, the Colonial Surgeon completed a report on the insanitary condition of the town of Victoria. It was observed that pigs were universally kept in the houses all over the town. In houses including those at Pound Lane and its vicinity, pigs were kept in kitchens, gullies at the back of houses and even under beds. The Colonial Surgeon urged that such terribly insanitary condition should not be tolerated any longer.

With such highly insanitary condition, a Bubonic Plague broke out at Taipingshan District in May 1894. To prevent the recurrence of epidemic diseases, “The Taipingshan Resumption Ordinance” was enacted in September 1894 to make way for improvement works in certain portions of the resumed area. The resumed area, bounded by Taipingshan Street, Square Street, Ladder Street, Caine Road, Po Yan Street, Rutter Street and Pound Lane, of private property being 6.25 acres in extent, was resumed on 26 September 1894. Pound Lane, one of the public streets in the resumed area, was closed to public traffic. The buildings in Taipingshan Street, Market Street (街市街) (or now Po Hing Fong, 普慶坊), Upper Station Street (差館上街), Square Street (四方街), Bridges Street (必列者士街) and Tank Lane (水池巷) as well as the then Taipingshan Market were pulled down by the Government between August and October 1895. Some of the building materials salvaged from the buildings demolished were sold by public auction.

Other improvement works included the construction of retaining walls and upgrading of the drainage system. In this regards, storm-water drains and retaining walls were constructed along the frontages of Pound Lane and Taipingshan Street in 1896. According to old maps and photos, the retaining walls were built round the corner of Pound Lane and a private building at No. 38 Taipingshan Street, opposite to a new Government public bathhouse under planning.⁴ The walls, however, were demolished around 2000 when the aforesaid private lot was redeveloped into the existing residential high-rise.

A public garden was also planned in the area, which would be bounded by part of Square Street (or Kui In Fong 居賢坊 now), south of Taipingshan Street, Market Street (renamed as Po Hing Fong after resumption) and Pound Lane, as well as the public bathhouse opposite to No. 38 Taipingshan Street

⁴ View Villa (順景雅庭) is situated at No. 38 Tai Ping Shan Street at present. The location of the retaining walls was first marked on a plan named “Taipingshan Resumption – Plan of Resumed Area as at Present” in “Report on, in Years 1894 – 1905 Insanitary Properties Resumptions”, *Hongkong Legislative Council Sessional Papers 1905*. The walls were also shown in the aerial photos of 1949.

(i.e. the present location of the Pound Lane Public Toilet and Bathhouse) and the Bacteriological Institute (now a Declared Monument known as the Old Pathological Institute) at Caine Lane near the top of Ladder Street in the resumed area. In 1904, this public garden was named as Puk Kung Yun (卜公園) in Chinese and Blake Garden in English. Its masonry retaining wall runs along the lower section of Pound Lane.

Pound Lane is one of the many hillside streets; but unlike other busy vehicular thoroughfares extending up the hillside such as Aberdeen Street, it is built with steps on a slope. The oldest steps constructed of long heavy granite slabs. The steps of the uppermost section intersecting with Hospital Road have been rebuilt with concrete. However, some traces of the previous granite steps can still be identified on site.

***Architectural
Merit***

Step streets such as this one are tangible evidence of Hong Kong's city development in the early years, reflecting the steep hilly environ of Hong Kong Island on which the city was built on. It had also undergone the deadly years of the plague. Although it was built later than Pottinger Street and Ladder Street (built in the 1840s), the flight of Pound Lane steps has social value and local interest as a pedestrian link between Tai Ping Shan Street, Hospital Road and Caine Road.

***Social Value
& Local
Interest***

Sheung Wan is one of the oldest Chinese towns of Hong Kong and Pound Lane retains much of the atmosphere and charm of the old district which still remains for the walker to enjoy. The lane is a secluded place that is quieter than many other areas of urban Hong Kong due to the absence of through traffic. It offers commanding views in both upward and downward directions, and gives a wonderful impression of the character of the old Taipingshan district.

Pound Lane steps has group value with other historic buildings and structures in its vicinity, including the Main Block of Tung Wah Hospital (Grade 1), Kwong Fook I Tsz (廣福義祠, Grade 2), the former quarters for scavenging coolies at No. 4 Hospital Road (醫院道 4 號, Grade 2), the Man Mo Temple compound on Hollywood Road (荷李活道文武廟, Declared Monument) and Ladder Street (樓梯街, Grade 1). They testified to the development of the Chinese community in Sheung Wan from the 1840s and still closely serve the daily needs of the local community.

Group Value

Pound Lane, as it is now, bears a long history. It provides a very old

Rarity,

example of a typical long and steep street in one of the first residential areas of the Chinese to be developed on Hong Kong Island, and gives a history of the life and hardships experienced by the earliest urban Chinese residents. It is here that tourists and locals can still catch a glimpse of what life was like in old Hong Kong. Basic repairs and improvement works to the lane have been carried out over the years. For instance, works for “constructing new side channels, reforming and concreting the road, erecting new steps” in Pound Lane at the section from Station Street to Rutter Street were carried out in 1881.⁵ To date, although some of the steps have been replaced and the landings resurfaced with concrete after years of use,⁶ there is still a continuity of form, texture and pattern which it had over a hundred years ago.

***Built Heritage
Value &
Authenticity***

⁵ Government Notification No. 327, *The Hongkong Government Gazette*, 1 January 1881.

⁶ For instance, it was marked on the site layout plan of the Pound Lane Public Toilet and Bathhouse of the year 1959 that the landings outside the building would be resurfaced and made good.

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