

**Historic Building Appraisal**  
**Pound Lane Public Toilet and Bathhouse,**  
**Sai Ying Pun, Hong Kong**

The existing Pound Lane Public Toilet and Bathhouse (磅巷公廁及浴室) was built at the junction of Pound Lane and Tai Ping Shan Street (formerly known as Taipingshan Street, 太平山街) in 1961, on the site of an earlier bathhouse. The old bathhouse was built in 1904 in response to the outbreak of a Bubonic Plague in May 1894 in Taipingshan District, which was where the early Chinese population lived, and it was demolished in the late 1950s. *Historical Interest*

It is thought that the English name of “Pound Lane” was 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.<sup>1</sup> Apart from the government pound, livestock such as pigs, cows and goats were also raised in buildings on Pound Lane and in its vicinity. Such animals were kept in shops, dwelling houses or shop-cum-dwelling houses. In April 1874, the Colonial Surgeon, Dr. Ph. B. C. Ayres, completed a report on the sanitary condition of the town of Victoria. It was observed that pigs were commonly kept in the houses all over the town. In houses including those on Pound Lane and in its vicinity, pigs were kept in kitchens, gullies at the back of houses and even under beds.

The unhygienic conditions in dwellings of ordinary Chinese residents were also described by Ayres in his Annual Report of the Colonial Surgeon for the year 1879, in which he described dwellings that in general lacked pure air, pure water, purity from damp, pure light and equable temperature. Ayres also believed that the Chinese population seldom bathed or washed due to the inconvenience and expense of getting water. In the Original Annual Report of the Colonial Surgeon for the year 1874, Ayres wrote:

*Women of the lowest class rarely wash themselves; men, only the exposed parts of their persons. I have seen many women who have candidly confessed that they have not even wiped themselves down with a damp cloth (which is the Chinese mode of washing) for years, and I saw no reason to doubt their*

---

<sup>1</sup> 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.

*words. If any washing is done, either of bodies or clothes, it is generally done in the kitchen... The average quantity of water used daily by each individual is about two quarts, and this is considered sufficient, as a rule, for cooking, drinking and washing purposes. Often it has to be brought from a considerable distance, and this is troublesome and expensive, so they do with as little as possible.*

Chinese dwellings were built with neither toilets nor bathrooms.<sup>2</sup> It was not until 1867, following the outbreaks of cholera between 1865 and 1866, that the government began to provide public privies. However, it was difficult for the government to find land to accommodate privies at convenient locations, and government facilities were therefore outnumbered by private ones established by businessmen, who regarded them as collection points for night soil to be sold as fertilizers to Mainland China.<sup>3</sup> With regard to bathhouses, only a small number of private baths can be identified from rates records.<sup>4</sup> It was not until the early 1880s when Governor Sir John Pope Hennessy was in office (1877 – 1882) that the government considered building public bathhouses, with a supply of warm water, for the Chinese, and hoped that further private ones charging an extremely moderate fee could be built. In fact, both the local Chinese and government officials were apathetic concerning housing and sanitary reforms. They were anxious about the costs that might be incurred and the potential need for increased taxation and rent. Neither of Hennessy's successors – Governor Sir George Bowen (1883 – 1885) and Governor Sir William Des Voeux (1887 – 1891)<sup>5</sup> – achieved any significant improvements in the sanitation of Taipingshan District. In 1893, after a house inspection tour of the district Colonial Surgeon Ayres was dismayed to observe that the terrible living conditions of the poor Chinese there remained unchanged from those he had reported upon twenty years previously.

---

<sup>2</sup> Ayres conducted inspections to the brothels in the Chinese community between 1873 and 1874. It was observed that generally there were in the kitchens one or more hutches used in as privies. Those hutches were composed of a few boards knocked together to form a screen, and from age and neglect they were saturated with filth. There were no proper containers for night soil in the hutches (sometimes a broken pot, sometimes a leaky old tub, sometimes nothing at all). Or men went to public privies, while women and children used covered pots, which were kept under their beds. Ayres stated that the very poor condition of the privies in brothels was equally applicable to private houses.

<sup>3</sup> For instance, only one public privy operated by the government on Pound Lane but around 10 privately-run public privies can be identified from the rates records of Taipingshan District from 1868 to 1894.

<sup>4</sup> For instance, only two private bathhouses on Pound Lane can be identified from the rates records of Taipingshan District from 1868 to 1894.

<sup>5</sup> Hong Kong was ruled by Officers Administering the Government, namely Sir William Henry Marsh (1885 – 1887) and William Gordon Cameron (April – October 1887) before the arrival of Des Voeux.

The very poor sanitation in Taipingshan District led to an outbreak of Bubonic Plague there in May 1894.<sup>6</sup> To prevent the recurrence of such epidemic diseases, “The Taipingshan Resumption Ordinance” was enacted in September 1894, aimed at facilitating improvement works within the resumed area. On 26 September 1894, a 6.25 acre area of private property, which was bounded by Taipingshan Street, Square Street (四方街), Ladder Street (樓梯街), Caine Road (堅道), Po Yan Street (普仁街), Rutter Street (律打街) and Pound Lane (磅巷), was resumed. The buildings in Taipingshan Street, Market Street (街市街) (today’s Po Hing Fong, 普慶坊), Upper Station Street (差館上街), Square Street, 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.

The improvement works also included the construction of a public bathhouse at the junction of Pound Lane and Taipingshan Street on the present site of the Pound Lane Public Toilet and Bathhouse. The site was originally occupied by several privately-owned houses, which were subsequently resumed by the government. The bathhouse, which opened in 1904, was the first permanent public bathhouse for both men and women free of charge.<sup>7</sup> Also within the resumed area, a public latrine was constructed at the junction of Tank Lane and Bridges Street,<sup>8</sup> while the Bacteriological Institute (now a Declared Monument known as the Old Pathological Institute) was built on Caine Lane near the top of Ladder Street.

In response to the influx of refugees and rapid increase in population in Hong Kong after the Second World War, the pre-war Pound Lane public bathhouse was demolished and redeveloped into the existing multi-storey toilet-cum-bathhouse in 1961. At present, it is known as the Pound Lane Public Toilet and Bathhouse.

The existing building was constructed on a prominent corner site, with its main facade facing onto Pound Lane and its flank walls facing Tai Ping Shan Street and Po Yee Street. It is of three stories in height, including a semi-basement as part of the ground floor, which was made necessary due to the steeply sloping site. Adjoining the toilet-cum-bathhouse is a temple

*Architectural  
Merit*

<sup>6</sup> Bubonic plague broke out in Taipingshan District again in 1896.

<sup>7</sup> Temporary bathhouses were established before permanent bathhouse buildings could be constructed.

<sup>8</sup> This latrine was later demolished and the land on which it was once situated became part of the Chinese Y.M.C.A. of Hong Kong (Central Building) at No. 51 Bridges Street (built in 1918).

named Kwong Fook I Tsz (廣福義祠). Female Toilet and Bathroom are housed on G/F, Male Toilet on 1/F, Male Bathroom and the office area (formerly the Caretaker's Quarters and Pump Room) on 2/F. The design is strictly functional and contains very little decoration either externally or internally. The main structure has reinforced concrete walls and a flat roof, and there are small square-shaped windows spaced at regular intervals on the elevation.

The Pound Lane Public Toilet and Bathhouse is now one of the bathhouses in operation in Hong Kong and provides a typical example of such facilities constructed shortly after the Second World War. It has provided a valuable service to the public for many years, but is now a less critical resource in the context of the modern city. Its design is very typical of functional government buildings of the 1950s to 1960s, which was a period when the emphasis was on fast, economical and efficient building construction.

**Rarity,  
Built Heritage  
Value &  
Authenticity**

During a major refurbishment around 2003, the external facades and internal finishes have been replaced with modern and more hygienic materials such as glazed tiling, and the old bathrooms were replaced with shower cubicles. An accessible toilet was also added to the open yard abutting the junction of Pound Lane and Tai Ping Shan Street. Although most of the original surface finishing, fittings and internal layout have been modernised, the basic form of the building has remained intact since 1961.

The building is situated in one of the earliest residential areas of the Chinese population on Hong Kong Island. It therefore contributes to the long and rich social history of the local community, their lives and the hardships they experienced, from the dangerous years of the Plague to the time of rapid housing development in the 1950s and 1960s, on through periods of prosperity and development, until the present day, with all its nearby modern public facilities. Like the other bathhouses in Hong Kong, the Pound Lane Public Toilet and Bathhouse is still important for people who live without or with inadequate bathing facilities. Its history thus provides a continuing link to the lives of local people in the district.

**Social Value  
& Local  
Interest**

Pound Lane Public Toilet and Bathhouse has group value with other historic buildings and structures in its vicinity, including the Pound Lane Steps (new item for grading assessment), Main Block of Tung Wah Hospital (Grade 1), Kwong Fook I Tsz (廣福義祠) (Grade 2), the former quarters for

**Group Value**

scavenging coolies at No. 4 Hospital Road (醫院道 4 號) (Grade 2), Man Mo Temple on Hollywood Road (荷李活道文武廟) (Declared Monument) and Ladder Street (樓梯街) (Grade 1). They testify to the early development of the Chinese community in Sheung Wan and continue to serve the daily needs of the local community.

## REFERENCES

### Archives at Public Records Office, Hong Kong

MM-0001. “Plan of Victoria, Hong Kong, 1867”

HKRS38-2-3 – HKRS38-2-50. “Rates Assessment, Valuation and Collection Books, 1865-1885.”

### Document Records at The Land Registry Office, Hong Kong

Property Particulars of Inland Lot number 1221.

### Printed Documents of the Colonial Office and Hong Kong Government

“Sanitation in Hong Kong – Report on the Licensed Brothels in Hongkong, 1874”, 19 January 1874, enclosed in “Sanitary Reports (Hongkong) – Sanitary State of the Goal (1877 – 1878) and the Dry Earth System”, *Hong Kong Administrative Reports*, 1879, from Hong Kong Government Reports Online.

“Report of the Colonial Surgeon on His Inspection of the Town of Victoria, and on the Pig Licensing System. Hongkong, April 1874”, 15 April 1874, enclosed in “Sanitary Reports (Hongkong) – Sanitary State of the Goal (1877 – 1878) and the Dry Earth System”, *Hong Kong Administrative Reports*, 1879, from Hong Kong Government Reports Online.

“Sanitation” in “Annual Report of the Colonial Surgeon”, 5 April 1875, enclosed in “Sanitary Reports (Hongkong) – Sanitary State of the Goal (1877 – 1878) and the Dry Earth System”, *Hong Kong Administrative Reports*, 1879, from Hong Kong Government Reports Online.

“Annual Report of the Colonial Surgeon (for 1879)”, 4 May 1880, *Hong Kong Administrative Reports*, 1879, from Hong Kong Government Reports Online.

“Baths and Wash-Houses” in “Address of His Excellency Sir John Pope Hennessy, K.C.M.G., to the Legislative Council of Hongkong, 7<sup>th</sup> of February 1882”, *Hong Kong Administrative Reports*, 1882, from Hong Kong Government Reports Online.

“Report of the Director of Public Works for the Year 1903”, *Hongkong Government Gazette*, 31 March 1904, from Hong Kong Government Reports Online.

“Order and Cleanliness Ordinance 1867”, *Hongkong Government Gazette*, 22 June 1867, from Hong Kong Government Reports Online.

“The Taipingshan Resumption Ordinance, 1894 (Ordinance No. 8 of 1894). *The Hongkong Government Gazette*, 29 September 1894, from Hong Kong Government Reports Online.

“Report on the Health and Sanitary Condition of the Colony of Hong Kong for the Year 1904”, *Hongkong Government Gazette*, 1905, from Hong Kong Government Reports Online.

Government Notification No. 327, *Hongkong Government Gazette*, 1 January 1881, from Hong Kong Government Reports Online.

Government Notification No. 757, *Hongkong Government Gazette*, 28 October 1904, from Hong Kong Government Reports Online.

“Report on, in Years 1894-1905, Insanitary Properties Resumptions”, *Hongkong Legislative Council Sessional Papers*, 1905, from Hong Kong Government Reports Online.

“Report of the Director of Public Works for 1895”, *Hongkong Legislative Council Sessional Papers*, 1896, from Hong Kong Government Reports Online.

“Report on the Progress of the Public Works during the First Half-Year 1896”, *Hongkong Legislative Council Sessional Papers*, 1896, from Hong Kong Government Reports Online.

“Report on the Progress of the Taipingshan Improvement Works”, 11 August 1896, *Hongkong Legislative Council Sessional Papers*, 1896, from Hong Kong Government Reports Online.

“Report of the Director of Public Works for 1896”, *Hongkong Legislative Council Sessional Papers*, 1897, from Hong Kong Government Reports Online.

### **Records at Architectural Services Department, Hong Kong**

*Pound Lane Bathhouse*, date unknown (File Ref: a033683)

*Public Latrine & Bath-house, Pound Lane*, 1958-59 (File Ref: a033684-6)

*Proposed Latrine & Bath-house, Pound Lane*, 1958 (File Ref: a060807)

*Improvement Works to Pound Lane Public Toilet, 2003* (File Ref: a033685)

### **Aerial Photos of the Hong Kong Government**

Aerial photos of Sheung Wan taken in 1999 and 2003.

### **Maps of the Hong Kong Government**

Crown Lands and Survey Office, P.W.D. Historical maps of 1863 (Map Ref: HD-22-1 and HD-22-3)

Crown Lands and Survey Office, P.W.D. Historical maps of 1887 (Map Ref: HG27-1)

Crown Lands and Survey Office, P.W.D. Historical maps of 1897 (Map Ref: HH45-8 and HH45-8)

### **Newspapers**

“Old Hongkong”. *South China Morning Post*, 15 November 1933.

### **Books, Articles and Other Sources**

Bloomfield, Frena. *Hong Kong's Street Names and Their Origins*, vol. 1. Hong Kong: Urban Council, 1984.

Chan, Ka-lam. *Ordinary Heritage of the Ordinary People: Hong Kong's Public Bathhouses*. The University of Hong Kong, 2012 (MSc e-thesis).

Chan-Yeung, Moira. *A Medical History of Hong Kong: 1842 – 1941*. Chinese University Press, 2018.

Empson, Hal. *Mapping Hong Kong*. Hong Kong: Government Printer, 1992.

Hong Kong Museum of Medical Sciences. *The Taipingshan Medical Heritage Trail* (太平山醫學史蹟徑). Hong Kong Museum of Medical Sciences Society, 2011.

Lau, Y.W. *A History of the Municipal Councils of Hong Kong: from the Sanitary Board to the Urban Council and the Regional Council*. Hong Kong: Leisure and Cultural Services Department, 2002.

Sayer, Geoffrey Robley. *Hong Kong 1862 – 1919: Years of Discretion*. Hong Kong University

Press, 1985.

王賡武(主編)，《香港史新編》（上冊）（香港：三聯書店，1997）。

莊玉惜，《有廁出租：政府共謀的殖民城市管治（1860—1920）》（香港：商務印書館，2018）。

梁濤，《香港街道命名考源》（香港：市政局，1992）。