

## Historic Building Appraisal

### Steps of Prince's Terrace, Mid-Levels, Hong Kong

Prince's Terrace is a privately-owned pedestrianised street, although it is open for public use. It was officially named “太子台” in Chinese and “Prince's Terrace” in English in the 1923 Gazette Notice. It is said that the street was named as such probably as a tribute to the Royal family, and Royal visits to Hong Kong.<sup>1</sup> According to the 1923 Gazette Notice, Prince's Terrace is the “road commencing at the South-west boundary of Inland Lot No. 152 in Peel Street and running in a south-easterly direction and terminating at its junction with Shelley Street being parallel to and immediately South-west of Caine Road”.<sup>2</sup> The location and boundary of this Inland Lot No. 152 (I.L. 152) can be identified from a land record dating from 1921. Today, this plot of land is composed of a number of sub-divided lots. The granite steps we see today mainly fall within the lots occupied by Nos. 17 and 19 Prince's Terrace. Their history can be traced back to 1885 – 1886 or perhaps even earlier.

*Historical  
Interest*

A “French Convent” situated on two plots of land on Caine Road, namely I.L. 151 and I.L. 152A, on Caine Road, was marked on a plan dated 1889, which is the earliest record of the kind available. A stairway leading from Peel Street to the side entrance of the convent on I.L. 152A is also identifiable on this plan. In 1890, I.L. 151 and I.L. 152A were sold by Douglas Lapraik to the Society of the Missions Etrangères.<sup>3</sup> It was then used as the headquarters of the society until it moved to No. 1 Battery Path (now a Declared Monument known as the former French Mission Building) near St. John's Cathedral in Central around 1917.<sup>4</sup>

Having said that, although a French convent existed on I.L. 151 and I.L. 152A from 1890 to around 1917, a property named “Douglas Villas” was

<sup>1</sup> “Old Hongkong”, *South China Morning Post*, dated 29 January 1934. While “Royal visits” are not specified in this newspaper article, it is learnt from a Gazette Notice of 1922 that Prince of Wales (later King Edward VIII and after abdication the Duke of Windsor) made his Royal visit to Hong Kong in April that year.

<sup>2</sup> Gazette Notice No. 567, *Hongkong Government Gazette*, 28 December 1923.

<sup>3</sup> The society was also known as French Procuration of the Mission Etrangères de Paris, Missions Etrangères de Paris and the French Society of Foreign Missions.

<sup>4</sup> According to the directories of 1891 to 1917, the society owned two properties in Hong Kong at that time. One was this convent used as the procure of the society. The other one was the Bethanie (Declared Monument) in Pok Fu Lam, which was completed in 1875 by the society as its first sanatorium in East Asia where sick missionaries could recover from tropical diseases before returning to their work. While the building at No. 1 Battery Path was built by the society in 1917 to house its procure, the convent on Caine Road, according to rates records, was only sold to an individual between 1920 and 1921.

marked in the same location on the maps of 1897 and 1901 instead. This mansion and the convent (including the steps) had the same configuration, thus indicating that they were the same building. The magnificence of the building was recorded in a historical photo. According to the rates records between 1885 and 1886, Douglas Villas was owned by Douglas Lapraik & Co. and occupied by W. Wotton.<sup>5</sup> Since these are the earliest available rates records for Douglas Villas, the associated stairway we still see today should date back to the period 1885 – 1886 or perhaps even earlier. Although it was sold to the Society of the Missions Etrangères in 1890 and redeveloped between 1922 and 1923, Douglas Villas was still remembered in the 1930s.

The surviving granite steps are composed of two main flights of steps separated by a landing, which is also constructed of granite slabs. The final platform of the stairway is in Peel Street. The balustrades on both sides of the stairway are made of grey brickwork rendered with lime plaster. There are four piers supporting the balustrade wall on each side, and the three pairs on the lower and intermediate levels are made of grey brickwork rendered with lime plaster or cement mortar. The pier at the top of the steps near Nos. 12 and 14 Prince's Terrace is built of granite in Classical Revival style and has a finely carved capstone. The two old retaining walls which support this stairway also still exist.

**Architectural  
Merit**

The granite steps are in fair condition but some of the edges or nosings of the granite treads have been broken. The stucco on the balustrade walls is also in a poor state of repair. One of the retaining walls remains in its original condition, while the other has been concealed by ornamental tiles. Unfortunately, the capstone of the granite pier was dislodged by a tree, which collapsed in August 2017 when a typhoon signal No. 10 (Typhoon Hato) (天鴿) was hoisted.

Flights of steps like these are not rare on Hong Kong Island. Due to the hilly terrain, there are many streets with steps. Prince's Terrace is now bordered by modern buildings on both sides of the street. All the buildings are high-rise with residential flats on upper floors and several of the ground floor units are used for commercial purposes, including art galleries and a café. As the surviving granite steps and pier in Prince's Terrace are component parts of

**Rarity,  
Built Heritage  
Value &  
Authenticity**

<sup>5</sup> Douglas Lapraik (1818 – 1869) came to the Far East in 1839 and arrived in Hong Kong around 1842. He founded the Hong Kong and Whampoa Dock Company Ltd., and was the donor of the Pedder Street Clock Tower which remained a local landmark from 1862 to 1913. His legacy endures in the names of a street, a lane, and a building. Douglas Street and Douglas Lane are named after him. He built a mansion called “Douglas Castle” (now being used as University Hall of The University of Hong Kong and a Declared Monument) where he lived for years.

an old residence known as “Douglas Villas”, which eventually became the headquarters of the Society of the Missions Etrangères, it can be said that they provide historical continuity and have some built heritage value. Although the stairway had some unsuitable repairs done over the years, most of the steps are still basically in their original and authentic condition.

The flights of steps provide direct access from Peel Street to Prince’s Terrace. They are also often used by pedestrians and local residents, including those living in Mosque Street (摩羅廟街) and Mosque Junction (摩羅廟交加街) who want to reach Central via Peel Street and then cut through Prince’s Terrace to the lower section of Shelley Street (些利街), instead of using the top end of Shelley Street, which is considered rather steep. The use of the steps and terrace as a place for location-filming is still fondly remembered by local residents.<sup>6</sup> The steps therefore have some social value. Due to their classical appearance, they can also be said to have some local interest.

***Social Value  
& Local  
Interest***

The flights of steps in Prince’s Terrace have group value with an important group of religious and residential buildings in the area around Caine Road and Shelley Street; for example, Kom Tong Hall (甘棠第) (Declared Monument), Jamia Mosque (清真寺) (Grade 1), The Hong Kong Catholic Cathedral of The Immaculate Conception (聖母無原罪主教座堂) (Grade 1) and Sacred Heart Chapel (聖心教堂) (Grade 1).

***Group Value***

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<sup>6</sup> For instance, a television episode named “鴨仔里春光” was shot at the steps and terrace in the early 1980s and is still fondly remembered by some of the residents there. The advertisement of an insurance company was also shot there in 2018.

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