

Historic Building Appraisal

Nos. 26A – C Graham Street, Central, Hong Kong

The row of three shophouses are situated at Nos. 26A – C Graham Street.¹ *Historical Interest*

The Chinese community, which mainly comprised newcomers from Mainland China, was first established along the northern coast of Hong Kong Island in the early 1840s, with settlements concentrated in the Upper, Middle and Lower Bazaars. The main business centre near the coast was called the 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.

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 areas to the east of Aberdeen Street (鴨巴甸街) in Central were inhabited by Europeans. This situation continued until the rise of wealthy Chinese merchants in the 1860s.

Nos. 26A – C Graham Street are situated within the divided lots of a plot of land known as Inland Lot No. 185 (or I.L. 185). I.L. 185 was first owned by a Scott named George Strachan, an architect, under a government lease commencing in 1844, with the earliest available rates records dating back to

¹ Graham Street is situated in one of the earliest settlements established on Hong Kong Island after the British takeover, with a history back in the 1840s. The naming of the street cannot be ascertained. Some said that it was named after James Graham (1792 – 1861, later knighted and became Sir James Graham), Secretary of State for the Home Department (1841 – 1846). Some believed that it was named after Lieutenant Colonel Fortescue Graham (1794 – 1890, later made a Major General), who was a senior Royal Marines officer, serving for 62 years and commanding the marine battalion in the wars in China and Europe, including the First Opium War (1839 – 1842) and Crimean War (1853 – 1856), while others may think that it was named after Henry Hope Graham, who was Captain in the 1830s, Major in the 1840s and Lieutenant Colonel in the 1850s. His time in Hong Kong can be traced back to the early 1850s. In 1855, he was appointed Justice of Peace. In 1857, he assumed command of troops and was appointed a member of Executive Council.

December 1844. In 1853, he sold the lot to a Portuguese chemist and druggist named João Joaquim Braga.² In 1879, a new government lease was entered into by another two Portuguese, Januario Antonio de Carvalho and Henrique Hyndman, who acted as the trustees of the will of the deceased J.J. Braga. In 1916, I.L. 185 was sold to James Albert Samuel, and continued to change hands from time to time thereafter. By 1921, according to rates records, the site was used for the purposes of dwelling, office and dwelling or shop and dwelling. However, it was indicated in those rates records that houses No. 11 and No. 13 Gage Street were situated within I.L. 185. Those houses, numbered “11” and “13”, with their frontage abutting Gage Street rather than Graham Street, were also indicated on a map dated 1897. In addition, the address “No. 11 Gage Street” can still be identified in a land document dated March 1921 as the present-day No. 26B Graham Street. According to the rates records dated July 1921, Chung Ting-chiu (鍾挺超) was the owner of Nos. 11 and 13 Gage Street.

The addresses of Nos. 26A, 26B and 26C Graham Street, are first identifiable in land documents dated from 1922 to 1923. According to those documents, the houses were once owned by Chung Ting-chiu in the early 1920s. Tai Tung-lim (戴東廉),³ who acquired the house lots at No. 26A from Chung Ting-chiu in 1922,⁴ sold them to the Tams in September 1923, while Chung Ting-chiu sold No. 26B to Leung Ming Shi (梁明氏) in February and No. 26C to The Chiu Chow Pat Yap Chamber of Commerce Limited (旅港潮州八邑商會) in January the same year.⁵ The rates collection of the two house lots, however, was cancelled from 1 September 1921. In July 1922, an interim assessment of rates was conducted for Nos. 26A, 26B, 26C and 26D Graham Street, instead of Nos. 11 & 13 Gage Street, at I.L. 185. An aerial photo dated 1924, the earliest one available, shows a row of houses at I.L. 185 in the same orientation of Nos. 26A to C Graham Street. With reference to the historical map, land and rates

² The Portuguese emigrated from Macau to Hong Kong for better opportunities soon after Hong Kong was made a British colony and opened to foreign trade. That emigration tide was more apparent from the 1850s onwards due to declining economic prospects and the social and political unrests in Macau. The newcomers mainly resided at the Mid-levels, such as Caine Road, Shelley Street, Peel Street and Chancery Lane. The vast majority of those Portuguese were employed as interpreters, clerks and bookkeepers in the Hong Kong government or European banks, trading companies and other expatriate institutions. They were deemed suitable for these roles because of their ability to speak Cantonese and English, as many of them had attended Catholic mission schools in Macau. A small number became merchants or businessmen, or some others joined the colonial military services. But the growth of the Portuguese population slackened from the early 1900s onwards, when many business and job opportunities had gone to the British who had greatly outnumbered the Portuguese.

³ Tai Tung-lim owned a number of properties and plots of land in Hong Kong.

⁴ Chung Ting-chiu was a merchant and proprietor of domestic tenements. In 1921, he was one of the petitioners objecting the proposed amendment to the Rating Ordinance of 1901.

⁵ The Tams were Tam Yui-yik (譚裔億), Tam Yee-pui (譚爾佩), Tam Yau-lung (譚友隆) and Tam Ping-tong (譚評塘). The Chiu Chow Pat Yap Chamber of Commerce Limited (旅港潮州八邑商會) was established in 1921. After the Second World War in 1945, its Chinese name was officially changed to “香港潮州商會” (Hong Kong Chiu Chow Chamber of Commerce).

records and aerial photo mentioned above, it is believed that the houses were built between 1922 and 1924.

Traces that Nos. 26A – C Graham Street were built as a row at the same time can still be identified on site – they are connected to each other by the archways in the shared party walls on G/F. Originally, it was a row of four houses from No. 26A to D, with No. 26D in the corner at the intersection of Graham Street and Gage Street. The trace of an archway between Nos. 26C and 26D still exists. Land records show that in 1922, No. 26D changed hands from Chung Ting-chiu to the Kwongs.⁶ No. 26D, together with Nos. 26A to C, is also first identified in the interim rates assessment in July 1922. The four houses survived the Japanese Occupation (1941 – 1945). According to the Japanese Title Deeds dated 1942 (昭和十七年), the houses, comprising shops on the ground floor and residential units on the upper floors (階上住宅階下商店/ 壹階商店・貳、參階住宅), were three-storey structures built of brickwork and timber (煉瓦及木造), each having its own staircase. They were in good condition (完整) at that time.⁷ Nonetheless, “CIP” (construction in progress) is marked on the house lot of No. 26D in a map dated 1983, showing that it was redeveloped in the early 1980s. At present, only Nos. 26A to C still exist. Over the years, shops selling vegetables, housewares and noodles, for instance, have been operated on the ground floor.

Nos. 26A – C Graham Street comprise three shophouses of three storeys, which sit in a continuous row and are stepped on a sloping site creating a terraced profile. They are a typical example of Hong Kong’s shophouses of the early 20th century. The houses share similar architectural characteristics. They are constructed with load-bearing brick walls while the recessed balconies at the main facades and the kitchens at the rear are built of concrete beams and slabs. Each house has a narrow frontage to Graham Street and deep floor space with a backyard, which adjoins another block by means of a shared brick party wall. Each also has a concrete roof sloping down gently towards the rear elevation.

***Architectural
Merit***

The columns of each house have lines expressed with neat vertical moulding, which extend above the roof parapet on the front elevation. There are simple geometric motifs on the columns and classical mouldings at the copings, whereas the roof parapet features a curved/scroll form openwork

⁶ The Kwongs were Kwong Yun and Kwong Man-kit. Land Registry, Property Particulars of Section B of Inland Lot No. 185.

⁷ The Japanese Title Deeds of Nos. 26B to D with ground floor plans are available, while that of No. 26A is missing. The record for No. 26B is more detailed in the description of the building structure, which indicates that it is made up of brickwork and timber. Only brickwork is mentioned in the records for Nos. 26C and D.

balustrade with vertical balusters. The ornamental pier at the centre of the balustrade carries Art Deco elements with a simple geometric pattern. The front facade is also decorated with classical cornices and string courses. Following the topography of the site, the string courses at the rear elevation run in a zig-zag pattern from one block to another. The stepped chimneys also follow the terraced profile of the houses. Besides, the original recessed balconies on the first and second floors of No. 26B and C are still identifiable, although the setback windows and doors have all been replaced with aluminium ones and the railings have been replaced with modern materials. The balcony of No. 26A has been enclosed by steel windows. The original concrete roof of No. 26C and part of No. 26B have also been removed and are covered with metal corrugated sheet.

Internally, on G/F, each party wall originally had two archways but these have been infilled with brickworks, except for one at No. 26B which is still open through to No. 26C. Some mouldings supporting the timber joists and boarding remain on the party walls. Accessed by timber staircases, the floors of the upper storeys were built of timber boarding supported by timber joists. At present, however, only part of the timber flooring at No. 26A is retained in dilapidated condition while those of No. 26B and C have either collapsed or been removed. Fragments of ceramic colour tiles in hexagonal shape can also be identified at G/F of No. 26A. In addition, all of the windows, at both front and rear elevations, have been replaced by aluminium ones as well.

The houses are a local landmark and a typical example of early 20th century shophouses. They serve as a reminder of a historical streetscape and the retail activities occurring along Graham Street. The continuous facade also looks rather iconic. *Social Value & Local Interest*

Nos. 26A – C Graham Street have group value with other shophouses nearby, namely No. 120 Wellington Street (Grade 1), Nos. 123, 125 and 127 Wellington Street (all Proposed Grade 1), and No. 99 F Wellington Street (Proposed Grade 2). They are 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*

Nos. 26A – C Graham Street are a typical example of early 20th century shophouses, with the building envelope and main decorative features generally retained while most of the flooring and internal layout have gone. The stepped profile of the row houses with a continuous facade bearing some Western *Rarity, Built Heritage Value & Authenticity*

influences makes them an interesting piece of built heritage and contributes to the aesthetic character of the streetscape. The buildings are also a local landmark which recalls the reminiscence of the historical streetscape and retail activities along Graham Street.

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