

Historic Building Appraisal
Nativity of Our Lady Chapel
Long Ke, Sai Kung, N.T.

The Nativity of Our Lady Chapel (聖母聖誕小堂), situated at the village of Long Ke (浪茄) in Sai Kung, was built in 1918 on the initiative of two priests (司鐸), namely Rev. Emilio Teruzzi (丁味略神父, 1887 – 1942) and Rev. Philip Lo Lee-tsung (盧履中神父, 1889 – 1970) of the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong. *Historical Interest*

The history of the missionary activities of the Catholic Church in the New Territories can be traced back to the 1860s. The Convention of Peking (北京條約) in 1860 provided missionaries with the freedom to practise their religion in Chinese territory, and the evangelisation work in San On District (新安縣), which included parts of Hong Kong, was entrusted to the Hong Kong Apostolic Prefecture (香港宗座監牧區) later the same year. Missionaries who preached on Hong Kong Island would learn Cantonese, while those in other parts of the territory would learn the Hakka dialect. The Hakka (客家) people were more ready to accept a new religion, hoping that the church would be a source of security against the injustices they suffered. The missionaries also drew a “Map of the San-On District (新安縣全圖)” (including the present-day New Territories), with both English and Chinese characters indicating the locations of many villages, on which Long Ke is marked as “Long Keh” (龍腳), meaning “dragon’s feet”.

The first evangelisation work in areas not under British jurisdiction was carried out in Tai Po. Rev. Simeone Volonteri (和神父, 1831 – 1904) preached in the Hakka villages of Wun Yiu (碗窰) and Ting Kok (汀角) from 1862 to 1864, and later Rev. Gaetano Origo (柯神父, 1835 – 1868) joined him in Ting Kok. Missionary activities then spread to Sai Kung when Rev. Origo first took up residence at Sai Kung Market (西貢墟) in 1865 and then, in early 1866, he later established a missionary station in the town (西貢墟傳教站), where he baptised a first group of 19 villagers. About 30 villagers from Yim Tin Tsai (鹽田仔) were baptised at Christmas that year.¹ By 1869, there were about 350 Catholics spreading across 12 Hakka villages in Sai Kung, including Yim Tin Tsai, Chek Keng (赤徑), Tai Long (大浪), Wong Mo Ying (黃毛應) and Pak Sha O (白沙澳).

According to an annual report of the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions (宗座外方傳教會) for 1913 – 1914, Rev. Angelo Ferrario (羅奕安神父, 1876 – 1933) started a Catholic community in the Hakka village of Long Ke. According to

¹ According to the current land records, Yim Tin Tsai is recorded as “鹽田仔” in Chinese, while “鹽田梓” has been adopted by the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong.

the annual report for 1914 – 1915 by Rev. Emilio Teruzzi (1887 – 1942),² the women of Long Ke village had been baptised at that time. Long Ke was a small village. For instance, according to a survey of the buildings and building lots at Long Ke in 1974, it had only about 30 building lots, and the villagers were surnamed Wong, Lau, Li, Cheng or Tang. Rev. Ferrario took over the responsibility of the Sai Kung District from 1905, but poor health forced him to leave Sai Kung in November 1914. He was succeeded by Rev. Emilio Teruzzi who was assisted by Rev. Yeung Cheuk-wah Joseph (楊倬華神父, 1878 – 1945) until 1917, when a newly ordained priest, Rev. Lo Lee-tsung (1889 – 1970) came to Sai Kung.³ Rev. Teruzzi and Rev. Lo, while following the evangelisation method of visiting village after village (巡迴傳教), also devoted time to building chapels, including the Nativity of Our Lady Chapel at Long Ke in 1918. During his 15 years in Sai Kung, Rev. Teruzzi defended villagers against abuses and injustices. This helped him both secure the support of the old members of the congregation and attract new converts. Government records shows that the congregation of the chapel was 80 in 1920, and the figure remained unchanged in 1939. An annual report of the Roman Catholic Church dated July 1935 stated that there was a school opened by the Church in Long Ke, providing education for children of Long Ke village. During the Japanese Occupation (1941 – 1945), Rev. Emilio Teruzzi still cared for the villagers of Sai Kung and asked Bishop Enrico Valtorta (恩理覺主教, 1883 – 1951) desperately for preaching in the district. In the initial period after Japanese Occupation, masses were said at this chapel at Long Ke once a month.

In the 1950s, Long Ke had a population of about 50. In 1954 and 1956, the Nativity of Our Lady Chapel was administered by the priest of Sacred Heart Church, Sai Kung (西貢聖心堂) as part of Tai Long Parish (大浪堂區). In 1955 and from 1957 to 1966, it was managed by the same church, but as part of Sacred Heart Parish (聖心堂區). In 1953, Rev. Joseph Famiglieti (范慕琦神父, 1916-2004) reported to the bishop that as the population of Long Ke declined, there was not enough children to study in the Catholic school and thus the school could not be open due to the shortage of pupils.

² Rev. Emilio Teruzzi (丁味略神父, 1887 – 1942) took charge of the Sai Kung District until November 1927, when he was called to work in the chancery (教會秘書處), as chancellor (秘書長), archivist (檔案處主任) and prison chaplain. Besides, he was Director of the Holy Spirit Seminary from 1928 to 1934, and Master of Ceremonies at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception from 1928 to 1938. He was also the representative of the Catholic Scouts (公教童軍) in Hong Kong. When war came and there was less demand for official duties, Rev. Teruzzi returned to Sai Kung, believing that he was in a better position to help the villagers than anyone else due to his close association with the people there. By that time, some 2,500 Catholics spread over 30 villages, with many of the people Catholic for four generations. Unfortunately, Rev. Teruzzi was murdered, probably by bandits, in 1942.

³ Rev. Philip Lo Lee-tsung (盧履中神父, 1889 – 1970) served in Sai Kung from 1917 to 1923. In 1923-1929, he worked in Rosary Church in Tsim Sha Tsui. In the 1930s and 1940s, he was consecutively the Rector of the Tam Shui District in Huiyang (惠陽淡水區主任司鐸), Pro-rector of the Yuen Long District (元朗區代理本堂), Rector of the Tsuen Wan District (荃灣區本堂), Rector of Precious Blood Church in Sham Shui Po (深水埗寶血堂本堂), and Chaplain (駐院神師) to the Home for the Aged in Ngau Chi Wan and Precious Blood Hospital in Sham Shui Po.

No information can be found, about the management of the chapel by the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong after 1966, which suggests that the services there were discontinued as villagers moved away in the mid to late 1960s. The emigration may be connected with the construction of High Island Reservoir (萬宜水庫) in the 1970s, which enclosed a watercourse locally known as *kwun mun shui tou* (官門水道). Tunnels were constructed to collect water for the reservoir from rivers in low-lying areas, which created a shortage of water for irrigation and thus led to the decline of farming at Long Ke. Moreover, several water channels were blocked up which, in turn seriously interrupted the water transport Long Ke relied upon. Visiting Long Ke sometime around 1968, Rev. John Paul Chan (陳保羅牧師, 1922 – 2010), Pastor of the Beautiful Gate Baptist Church (美門浸信會) described the village as abandoned.

Rev. John Paul Chan was the founder of Operation Dawn (晨曦會), which aims to rehabilitate drug addicts through the gospel. In May 1968, it established the Long Ke Rehabilitation Centre (浪茄戒毒村), the first gospel rehabilitation centre in Hong Kong. The centre operated at Long Ke until 1976 when it moved to Dawn Island (晨曦島) in Sai Kung Bay. One of the centre's best-known successes was the former triad member and drug addict Chan Shun-chi (陳慎芝), who received treatment there in 1974. Following his rehabilitation, Chan joined Rev. Harold Schock (宋和樂牧師) of the Baptist Church, who founded the Wu Oi Christian Centre (基督教互愛中心) in 1973. In 1981, the Wu Oi Christian Centre opened the Wu Oi Christian Rehabilitation and Training Centre (基督教互愛中心浪茄訓練中心) in Long Ke for male drug addicts with the Nativity of Our Lady Chapel once as its main premises for the centre, providing a dormitory and activity room for up to 20 drug addicts and several staff members. New houses built in the 1980s allowed it to receive up to 70 residents at one point, and it currently houses about 10 in the summer of 2021. Religious services were also organised in the chapel until a new one was constructed by Wu Oi in the 1980s.

The Nativity of Our Lady Chapel and other surviving chapels, including St. Joseph's Chapel (聖若瑟堂) at Yim Tin Tsai, Rosary Mission Centre (玫瑰小堂) at Wong Mo Ying and Holy Family Chapel (聖家小堂) at Chek Keng (all Grade 2), the Immaculate Conception Chapel (聖母無原罪小堂) at Tai Long and Immaculate Heart of Mary Chapel (聖母無玷之心小堂) at Pak Sha O (both Grade 3), and Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows Chapel (聖母七苦小堂) at Pak Tam Chung (北潭涌, Proposed Grade 3), is a group of historic chapels of the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong witnessing the historical development of the Hakka communities and missionary activities at Sai Kung Peninsula.

The chapel is a single-storey building with a pitched tile-roof originally and *Architectural*

replaced by metallic materials around the late 1990s. The plastered and painted walls are built of granite blocks, providing evidence of how building methods and materials were adapted to local requirements. Chinese characters showing the name of Wu Oi Centre (互愛中心), as well as Bible excerpts including 「福音是神的大能」 (meaning “the Gospel is the Power of God”);⁴ and 「耶穌是道路真理生命」 (meaning “Jesus is the Way, Truth and Life”),⁵ have been painted on the facades. *Merit*

The chapel is of modest scale with minimal decoration. The interior space is divided equally by a partition from east to west into two parts, connected by an archway. One half to the north was for prayer, meditation and rituals, and is currently used as a space for leisure and recreation, with the former altar in the front flanked by a pair of columns decorated with capitals connected by a stepped profile and an archway. The other half to the south is used for meeting, gathering and logistics, while its cockloft is currently used for storage of miscellaneous items.

The chapel had served the villagers of Long Ke for several decades. In the 1960s and 1970s, masses were organised there by Rev. Adelio Lambertoni (林柏棟神父, 1939 – 2006) and Rev. Valeriano Fraccaro (范賚亮神父, 1913 – 1974) who were the priests of the Sacred Heart Church, Sai Kung about once in a fortnight.⁶ They are still fondly remembered by the older generations of the congregation, as revealed by the oral history interviews of a Sai Wan village representative conducted by the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong in 2018. Moreover, the chapel still has particular relevance to the Catholic community in witnessing the development and spread of the Catholic faith in Hong Kong, particularly Sai Kung Peninsula. Besides, the site has also been serving as a drug rehabilitation centre for several decades. The renowned star cum Christian Roy Chiao (喬宏, 1927 – 1999) had given a speech in religious service in the chapel. Open Day is usually organised annually for the public. On the whole, this most easterly chapel at Long Ke signifies the historic presence of Catholic evangelists in the remote south-eastern tip of Sai Kung Peninsula before their role diminished due to socio-economic changes after the construction of High Island Reservoir and its related waterworks. *Social Value & Local Interest*

The chapel does not have group value with other graded buildings in the vicinity. *Group Value*

⁴ This phrase is taken from Romans, 1:16.

⁵ This phrase is taken from John, 14:6.

⁶ They would embark their journey from Sai Kung Sacred Heart Church and went to Sha Tsui first on foot to celebrate mass at Immaculate Heart of Mary Chapel (the village and chapel submerged under High Island Reservoir now) there. Then they walked through the hill path to Long Ke to conduct another mass at Nativity of Our Lady Chapel. Around the evening, they arrived at Sai Wan celebrating the mass at the Star of the Sea Chapel there.

The Nativity of Our Lady Chapel is a reminder of the Hakka communities, the missionary activities and the development of waterworks in Sai Kung. The tiles and timber structure of the pitched roof were replaced with metallic materials around the late 1990s after the pitched roof was seriously damaged by typhoons. The parapet with a cross on the top of the roof has also gone. The archways and a pair of columns in the interior, the walls built of granite blocks and the building form are the major historic features that have been preserved.

Rarity,
Built Heritage
Value &
Authenticity

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