

Historic Building Appraisal
No. 20 High Street, Sai Ying Pun, H.K.

High Street is situated on a slope above First, Second and Third Street in Sai Ying Pun. It is also referred to as Fourth Street. The street first appeared on a map from 1859, which depicted the street with dashed lines, meaning the street was proposed to be formed. Records show that the street was proposed to be named High Street in 1860, and land sales for the street began in 1861. *Historical Interest*

No. 20 High Street is located on Inland Lot No. 6488, but the lot was known as Inland Lot No. 690 Section D Subsection 1 before 2015. There used to be a building without back yard nor scavenger lane at this location in 1913, as detailed on an indenture of sale of the lot. In 1926, when the building on the lot was in the process of being rebuilt, the owners of the lot signed a scavenger lane covenant with the Government, attaching a plan showing the current footprint of the building. It was also recorded in the rates collection book that rates were not collected from 1 July 1925 until 1 July 1927. Hence, it is believed that the existing building on No. 20 High Street was completed in July 1927 at the earliest.

Land records show that before 1927, the lot belonged to Chan Lai Hing (陳麗馨) and Chu Kam Ying (徐錦英). In January 1927, which is likely before the completion of the building, the lot was sold to Lam Yat Hing (林日卿 or 林逸興), who died in 1941. The lot and building were then inherited by Lam Yuen (林源 alias Lam Ching 林滢) and Lam Sing Hoi (林星海) in 1949.

Little is known about the Lam family. It has been found that a Lam Sing Hoi was the Divisional or District Air Raid Warden of the Western Division who was mobilised in 1940, but it is not certain whether he is the same Lam Sing Hoi as the property owner. However, it is certain that the owner Lam Sing Hoi returned to mainland China and was a Chinese medicine trader during the Japanese Occupation, as shown in a letter of authorisation attached to the Title Deed of the House Registration Office of the Japanese Military Government in 1943.

The architect of the building, as indicated on the above-mentioned scavenger lane covenant, was Denison, Ram & Gibbs Architects, a famous architectural firm in Hong Kong responsible for building some of the territory's monuments and graded buildings, such as the Helena May in Garden Road, Eliot Hall and May Hall at the University of Hong Kong, and Matilda Hospital on the Peak. *Architectural Merit*

It was observed in 1943 and recorded in the Title Deed of the Japanese Occupation that the four-storey building was constructed of reinforced concrete and timber. Bricks can also be observed in some of the main walls. Half of a semi-circular parapet wall can be seen at the roof level, decorated with Greek key pattern. This indicates that the building used to be symmetrical with the adjacent No. 18 High Street, which however has already been rebuilt. The building has recessed balconies on the upper floors. On the left hand side of the roof parapet wall, there is a vase-shaped decoration. A chimney stack is observable at the back. There is also a narrow scavenger lane observable at the back of the building, with access to adjacent buildings blocked off, as well as an enclosed backyard, both are typical features of tenement houses built after the enactment of the Public Health and Buildings Ordinance in 1903.

According to the Title Deed of the Japanese Occupation, the building was used for residential purposes, although from photos of the recent past, it can be seen that the ground floor has also been used for shops. Currently, the ground floor shop is separated from the first, second and third floors. The two areas use different entrances, and a wooden and brick wall has been built between the ground floor shop and the staircase leading to the upper floors. The old wooden staircase has been retained, but the top has been covered with an extra layer of material for durability and safety.

A granite threshold can be observed at the main entrance. Original floor tiles are found on both the second and third floors, while the first floor has been repaved with wooden planks. The balconies were fitted with new metal balustrades in 2018, when the current owner acquired the building. Meanwhile, the French doors and windows leading out to the balconies have not been modified except for having been painted white. There is a metal ladder leading up to the flat roof at the end of the corridor on the third floor.

The building at No. 20 High Street is one of the examples of the surviving pre-war tenement houses in Sai Ying Pun. It is easily distinguishable from the surrounding buildings due to the delicate design of the façade.

***Social Value
and Local
Interest***

There are a number of historic buildings within walking distance. Along High Street are the Facade of the Old Mental Hospital (Declared Monument), Tsung Tsin Mission of Hong Kong Kau Yan Church, Main Building and Staff Quarters of Old Lunatic Asylum Chinese Block. Located somewhat further away are the Main Building and Annex Block of Old Tsan Yuk Maternity Hospital, Second Street Public Bathhouse and Western Magistracy on the First Street. Other buildings within walking distance include Main Building of St. Stephen's Girls' College, King's College, Bonham Road Government Primary School, a cluster of historic buildings at the

Group Value

University of Hong Kong, including Main Building, Hung Hing Ying Building, Tang Chi Ngong Building, Fung Ping Shan Building, Eliot Hall and May (all Declared Monuments), No. 4 Hospital Road, 35 Bonham Road, Old Upper Levels Police Station, Front Block of Chinese Rhenish Church and Caritas Ling Yuet Sin Kindergarten.

This type of pre-war tenement house is becoming rare. It bears witness to the history and development of Sai Ying Pun. Even though the top floors of the building have been adapted for modern use, having been converted into serviced apartments since 2018, architectural features such as the parapet wall, roof decoration, granite threshold at main entrance, old wooden staircase, old floor tiles and period French doors on the upper floors can still be seen today.

***Rarity,
Built Heritage
Value &
Authenticity***

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