

**Historic Building Appraisal**  
**Ex-Office Building of Sha Tin Rural Committee,**  
**No. 248 Pai Tau, Sha Tin, N.T.**

The ex-office building of the Sha Tin Rural Committee (沙田鄉事委員會) (the *Historical Interest* “ex-office building”) was built at Pai Tau near the Sha Tin Station along the Kowloon-Canton Railway in 1949. The building was named “沙田鄉公所” in Chinese (literally the Sha Tin Rural Office) when it was built. It was the first building of its kind to serve as a rural office, specifically for the Sha Tin Rural Committee.

In the past, Sha Tin was divided into nine *yeuks* according to its districts. Before World War II, the only village alliance that existed in Sha Tin was the “nine *yeuks*” (九約, literally the alliance of nine).<sup>1</sup> The “nine *yeuks*” did not have a fixed meeting place and would meet at Che Kung Temple in Sha Tin when an occasion arose.

Hong Kong after the war was in dire need of reconstruction. John Barrow, the then District Officer of the New Territories, mobilised villagers in the New Territories to set up their own village groups and encourage the election of their own representatives to deal with village matters. With the enthusiastic response and participation of Sha Tin village elders such as Ng Din Ping (吳殿平), Tsang Kwong Yan (曾廣仁) and Lau Sui Sau (劉水秀), etc., the Sha Tin Rural Committee was established in 1947. It marked the beginning of a new chapter for village governance in the region. Ng Din Ping was elected as the first Chairman of the Committee.

At the beginning, the Sha Tin Rural Committee used a premises which was once a *Kui Yik Soh* (區役所) during the Japanese Occupation, and later rented a village house in Pai Tau to serve as its temporary office. The functions then were mainly distribution of food items such as rice, sugar and oil to villagers for relief. In 1949, through a support initiative by Barrow, the Government granted a piece of land at the present site of No. 248 Pai Tau as the permanent office of the Sha Tin Rural Committee.

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<sup>1</sup> Nine *Yeuk* (九約), i.e. alliance of nine groups of villages, included Tai Wai *Yeuk* (大圍約), Tin Sam *Yeuk* (田心約), Keng Hau *Yeuk* (徑口約), Pai Tau *Yeuk* (排頭約), Kak Tin *Yeuk* (隔田約), Fo Tan *Yeuk* (火炭約), Sha Tin Tau *Yeuk* (沙田頭約), Sha Tin Wai *Yeuk* (沙田圍約) and Siu Lek Yuen *Yeuk* (小瀝源約).

The ex-office building of the Sha Tin Rural Committee was designed by the then District Officer South, James Wakefield. According to a newspaper report in 1949, the building consisted of a rural office, a reception room and a maternity home.<sup>2</sup> The construction costs amounted to \$25,000, of which \$4,000 came from the Government, \$6,000 from the Chinese Temples Committee, and the rest raised by villagers. Construction works were completed in May 1949 and a grand opening ceremony was held on 12 July in the same year, officiated by John Barrow and with the attendance of a few hundred guests. In his address, Barrow remarked, “whereas in the past, villagers could approach District Offices directly, now with the establishment of the rural committees and their elected members, when problems arise, the rural committees could help villagers liaise with District Offices for solutions.”<sup>3</sup> It shows that the main function of the rural committees was to serve as a channel of communication between the Government and the people.

Later, the succeeding Chairman of the Committee, Ng Chung Chi (吳松熾) made further plans to construct additional wings to the left and right of the main building. Construction was completed in October 1960 with the west wing housed an office on the ground floor and the Chairman’s office on the first floor, while the east wing served as a public clinic. As to the original main building, it was used as meeting rooms and Government offices to diversify the services provided at the Sha Tin Rural Office.

The Chinese name of the “沙田鄉公所” was changed to “沙田鄉事委員會” in 1978. In 2016, its office moved to No. 13 Pai Tau Street, while the old building near the Sha Tin Station has since been left vacant.

Situated on a raised platform built of granite stone blocks, the ex-office building comprises a main building, two extension wings and a detached storeroom, all of which were constructed of reinforced concrete. There are two flights of steps, one on the left side and one on the right side of the raised platform, leading from street level to the small front yard of the building. The original concrete rectangular railings enclosing the front yard are still largely intact. *Architectural Merit*

The design of the one-storey main building is simple and functional in a rectangular plan. The stepped parapet along the roof end of the front facade is inscribed with the name of the building in both English and Chinese – “SHATIN RURAL COMMITTEE” and “沙田鄉事委員會”. Three flag poles are evenly

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<sup>2</sup> 〈建築沙田鄉公所 加強治安措施〉,《華僑日報》,1949年1月21日。

<sup>3</sup> 〈新界民政署長 協助沙田居民 解決生活困難〉,《香港工商日報》,1949年7月13日。

spaced behind the stepped parapet. A flat-roofed porch at the front façade is supported by square columns forming arches on both sides. At the rear is a row of toilets and kitchen separated from the main building with a long and narrow lightwell in between. On the roof, a chimney stack can be seen at the rear eastern end. A segmental pediment-like structure is found along the back of the stepped parapet.

Two extension wings were added to both sides of the main building in 1960. Both wings are two-storey high with a pitched roof. Timber rafters, purlins and tiled roof can be seen in the west wing, while the east wing has been replaced by corrugated metal roofing. The Chinese name of the building is inscribed on the gable wall of the east wing, such that people from the direction of Pai Tau Village can recognise the building easily. The main building and the two extension wings are connected on the ground floor. The roof of the main building is accessible from the first floor of each of the two extension wings.

The present layout has the meeting room occupying the whole ground floor of the main building except a room for the Chairman at the north eastern corner. The toilets and kitchen remain in the rear. Both floors of the extension wings serve as office area. Apart from the main entrance which gives access to the main building through the porch, there are also entrances on both side elevations of the extension wings.

There is a small detached single-storey storeroom, which was added during the extensions in 1960, on the west side of the main building.

From a social perspective, the ex-office building had served as a hub for a wide range of services for the local community since it was built in 1949. In earlier times after the Sha Tin Rural Committee was established, it mainly helped villagers to resume farming after the war and played the role of arbitrator for issues such as marital and property disputes. Later it took up social welfare functions such as providing shelter and food to the needy in times of natural disaster, setting up the Fook Tak Association (福德會, literally association for welfare and virtue) to provide relief funds, providing funding for the construction of a market, a public school, and even a fire station for the benefit of Sha Tin residents.

*Social Value  
and Local  
Interest*

In its early days, the Sha Tin Rural Office played a pivotal role in the provision of Government services. Staff from various Government departments were deployed to the Rural Office to provide public services to the villagers during different periods of time. These services included the application for identity cards and birth certificates, dog licensing and free rabies vaccinations, etc. In 1971,

working in tandem with the newly enacted Marriage Reform Ordinance (the implementation of monogamous marriages), the Government set up marriage registries in various rural offices in the New Territories to facilitate marriage registration for villagers. The east wing of the Sha Tin Rural Office was once used as a marriage registry. The Sha Tin Rural Office in earlier times provided a convenient venue for villagers to complete procedures and formalities as required by the Government, like the Government Offices of today.

A maternity home was already in place at the ex-office building on its completion in 1949, followed by an all-purpose clinic in 1951. Medical services as well as prenatal check-ups for pregnant women and childcare services were provided. These public health services ceased when a new clinic and maternity home were opened at the present site of the Sha Tin (Tai Wai) Clinic in 1965.

The construction of the ex-office building marked the first step in village governance as it provided a permanent home for the Sha Tin Rural Committee. The building, which still survive today, was the first of its kind to implement a new kind of village administration in the post-war era. The building was a testament to the joint efforts of the Government and the Sha Tin community in strengthening communication and cooperation in relation to village matters.

The ex-office building is within walking distance of other graded historic buildings, such as Nos. 5A, 5B, 5C and 6 Pai Tau and Lam Ancestral Hall. ***Group Value***

The ex-office building is the first and the oldest surviving building purposely built as a rural office in the late 1940s, which bears witness to the development of the rural committees in the New Territories. ***Rarity,  
Built Heritage  
Value &  
Authenticity***

It is a simple utilitarian building. The front central porch of the main building, together with its stepped parapet inscribed with the name of the office, are iconic architectural features of the building. They served as an important backdrop for the photographing of important events over the years, such as the opening ceremony and inauguration ceremony of the Sha Tin Rural Committee.

The ex-office building retains much of its authenticity in terms of overall appearance, despite some alterations carried out over the years. These include installing metal railings on top of the original concrete rectangular railings and the raised platform, replacing the original windows and doors with modern ones, turning the original doorways on the front façade of each of the two extension wings into windows, and replacing the roof of the east wing with corrugated metal sheeting.

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