

Historic Building Appraisal
Underground Public Latrine,
corner of Aberdeen Street and Staunton Street,
Sheung Wan, Hong Kong

The history of underground toilets in Hong Kong can be traced back to the period at the beginning of the twentieth century. Existing records show that the first underground toilet ever built in Hong Kong was a trough closet built in 1901 at Gough Street below the playground at the old site of Belilios Public School (庇理羅士女子中學, the first government school for girls in Hong Kong, founded in 1890). From 1901 to 1924 a total of 13 underground public toilets or trough closets were built by the Public Works Department.

*Historical
Interest*

The underground public latrine located at the junction of Aberdeen Street (鴨巴甸街) and Staunton Street (史丹頓街) at the southern corner of the Hollywood Road Former Married Police Quarters site (formerly the site of the old Queen's College) was built in 1918. When this latrine was built, there was an open-air street market on the north side of Staunton Street between Aberdeen Street and Shing Wong Street (城皇街). This street market disappeared during the Japanese occupation (1941-1945) and the Bridges Street Market was built shortly after World War II.

The underground public latrine at the junction of Aberdeen Street and Staunton Street comprises two portions, one for men and one for women. The entrance to the male latrine is from the north side of Staunton Street and the female latrine is from Aberdeen Street. This latrine remains even though the old Queen's College site was allocated to the Hong Kong police for building police quarters after World War II. Most of the underground public latrines have now been demolished and the subject latrine is no longer in its original use.

The latrine is actually built under the pavement of Staunton Street with two entrances, one in Aberdeen Street and one in Staunton Street. Each entrance has a flight of steps leading down to a locked iron gate. The steps have ornamental parapet walls with piers, panels and copings in neo-classical style, and finished with modern mosaic tiles. The modern mosaic tiles is considered to be reversible however as the tiles could be chipped off and the original stucco finish reinstated.

*Architectural
Merit*

Nothing can be seen of the latrine from street level but the rear wall can be seen from inside the former Hollywood Road married police quarters site. Part of the old random rubble retaining wall to Staunton Street was demolished to build the latrine. The rear wall is built of red bricks in Flemish Bond with ribbon pointing. The wall is raised off a granite plinth and is strengthened by

four buttresses. There are two ventilation chimneys, three high level louvered windows, and two iron air bricks at lower level. The top of the wall is finished with a rendered parapet wall and a chain link fence.

Internally, the latrine is divided into two compartments by a cross wall to form male and female latrines. All sanitary fittings have been removed and the latrine now seems to be used for storage purposes.

Most underground latrines in Hong Kong have now been demolished and the subject latrine is one of few remaining. Although it is a utilitarian structure of little architectural merit, it does have built heritage value as a historic relic of public sanitation in early twentieth-century Hong Kong. Apart from the modern mosaic tiling to the entrances the latrine has not been altered and retains its authenticity.

Underground toilets were built for the benefit of people living and working in the vicinity and also for use by the general public. Therefore, the subject toilet was of considerable social value. It is well remembered by local residents and is of local interest to historians.

It is among the cluster of historic sites in the area, for example, there are three declared monuments nearby, namely, Former Central Police Station (前中區警署) at Hollywood Road, Former Central Magistracy (前中央裁判司署), Former Victoria Prison (前域多利監獄) in Old Bailey Street and Old Pathological Institute (前病理學院) in Caine Lane. All these buildings have good value from a heritage and cultural point of view. The site also forms part of the Central and Western Heritage Trail – The Sheung Wan Route.

It is not very likely that the toilet will ever revert to its original purpose, but it could continue to be used for storage or other purposes, especially when the site of the police quarters in Hollywood Road is going to be transformed into a cultural industries landmark in Hong Kong.

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

***Social Value
& Local
Interest***

Group Value

***Adaptive
Re-use***