

Historic Building Appraisal

Tin Shui Lau Fong

Chek Keng Sheung Wai, Sai Kung North, Tai Po, New Territories

“Tin Shui Lau Fong” (天水流芳)¹ is a grey-brick building² located in the western part of Chek Keng (赤徑). The name is derived from the plaque sitting above the main doorway bearing these four words in Chinese calligraphy characters. Locals also call the building Chius’ Mansion (趙氏大宅) because the building is owned by members of the Chiu clan, who settled in Chek Keng Sheung Wai (赤徑上圍) generations ago. Judging from old aerial photographs, it is believed that the building was constructed after 1924 but no later than 1942, when it was used by the British Army Aid Group (BAAG, 英軍服務團) as an intelligence centre and liaison point during the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression.³

*Historical
Interest*

The area where “Tin Shui Lau Fong” stands was of strategic importance during the War of Resistance. Located in the east of the Sai Kung peninsula, Chek Keng was relatively remote and surrounded by a range of desolate mountains on three sides, which allowed the underground resistance forces to retreat and hide if they were attacked. To the north, it faces a narrow inner bay, Chek Keng Hau (赤徑口), from where boats could easily navigate their way to the southern part of Mainland China via nearby Mirs Bay (大鵬灣), and it thus provided a convenient stopover for the movement of people and messages from Hong Kong to Mainland China.

¹ The name “Tin Shui Lau Fong”, literally meaning “heavenly waters leaving a good reputation”, is believed to derive from the place of origin of the Chiu clan, whose ancestors thrived and rose to prominence in the Western Han Dynasty (202 BC-9 AD) in ancient Tianshui County (Tin Shui County, 天水郡), which now encompasses the present-day city of Tianshui in Gansu Province (甘肅省天水市). See 蘇浙生：《中華姓氏叢書·趙》(香港：中華書局(香港)有限公司，2002年)，頁63-64。

² The existing building of Tin Shui Lau Fong was originally a three-bay building. The adjoining block furthest to its right, as we see today, was built after the Second World War, probably between 1954 and 1956 as observed from the aerial photos of 1949, 1954 and 1956. See Survey and Mapping Office, Lands Department. Aerial Photo No.: N81A_0118-5138, dated 24 April 1949; Aerial Photo No.: N81A_0539-F21_0087, dated 19 October 1954; and Aerial Photo No.: F21_560-0158, dated 28 December 1956.

³ An aerial photo taken in 1924 contains no indication of the existing building at the site at that time. The next aerial photo available was taken in 1949, and it clearly shows that “Tin Shui Lau Fong” now stood there, confirming that it must have been built between 1924 and 1949. Another archival record suggests an earlier date can be ascribed to “Tin Shui Lau Fong”, as it states that the building was already being used by the BAAG as a liaison post by the end of 1942. See Survey and Mapping Office, Lands Department. Aerial Photo No.: NH35-0012, dated 17 November 1924; and Aerial Photo No.: N81A_0118-5138, dated 24 April 1949. Also see E. M. Ride (comp.), “B.A.A.G. Series, Volume IV, Advance Headquarters, Waichow - Field Operations Group” (Printed and distributed by Special Collections, The University of Hong Kong, 2006), pp. ii and 190, https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Rxxh1B_8qICTGZAzRuukv6Tzy4NSNA-e/view, accessed on 20 September 2024 and Osler Thomas, “With the BAAG in Wartime China,” in Clifford Matthews and Oswald Cheung (eds.), *Dispersion and Renewal: Hong Kong University During the War Years* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1998), pp. 308-309.

When the Japanese invaded Hong Kong in December 1941, armed units of the Guangdong People's Anti-Japanese Guerrillas (廣東人民抗日游擊隊)⁴ under the leadership of the Communist Party of China, who were active in the vicinity of Hong Kong, made their way into various parts of the New Territories in preparation for guerrilla warfare against the Japanese. This included establishing operating bases, protecting villages by ridding the area of bandits, calling for local support for the resistance and collecting weapons and armaments left by the British for their own use. The armed units were then consolidated into the Hong Kong and Kowloon Brigade (港九大隊, the "Brigade"),⁵ which announced its establishment at the Rosary Mission Centre, a chapel in Wong Mo Ying (黃毛應), Sai Kung, on 3 February 1942 with Tsoi Kwok Leung (蔡國樑) as its commander.⁶ The main roles of the Brigade were to collect intelligence, harass Japanese operations and supply lines as well as rescue intellectuals, politicians and Allied prisoners-of-war (POWs). The Brigade later set up an operating base at the Holy Family Chapel in Chek Keng in the middle of 1942.

British resistance to the Japanese invasion of Hong Kong lasted for 18 days. After the city fell, Lindsay Ride (賴廉士),⁷ a member of the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps (HKVDC), was detained in the Sham Shui Po POW Camp, but escaped to China together with three fellow POWs in January 1942 with the help of the Chinese guerrillas. In mid-1942, Ride founded the BAAG, establishing its headquarters in Guilin, Guangxi province and an advance headquarters (AHQ) in Huizhou, Guangdong province, which was the most southerly base of the BAAG in Mainland China to maintain underground contacts with Hong Kong.⁸ In November

⁴ The Guangdong People's Anti-Japanese Guerrillas was renamed the East River Column of the Guangdong People's Anti-Japanese Guerrillas (廣東人民抗日游擊隊東江縱隊, the "East River Column") in December 1943.

⁵ The Brigade was named Hong Kong and Kowloon Brigade (港九大隊) when it was established in early 1942. It was later renamed as Hong Kong and Kowloon Independent Brigade (港九獨立大隊) in late 1944 when it became a unit directly led by the headquarters of the East River Column. See 劉智鵬、劉蜀永主編：《港九大隊志》（香港：商務印書館（香港）有限公司，2022年），頁24。

⁶ Chan Sui-jeung, *East River Column: Hong Kong Guerrillas in the Second World War and After* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009), pp. 38–39.

⁷ Lindsay Ride joined the HKVDC in 1931, rising to the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel and serving as Commander of the Field Ambulance by 1941. See "Battle of Hong Kong 1941-[Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps] Professor Sir Lindsay Ride," Hong Kong Baptist University Library, accessed on 30 October 2024, <https://digital.lib.hkbu.edu.hk/1941hkbattle/en/data.php?show=item&id=FW00035>. Lindsay Ride, "The Test of War," in Brian Harrison (ed.), *University of Hong Kong: The First 50 Years* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1962), p.75. Edwin Ride, *BAAG: Hong Kong Resistance 1942–1945* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp. 1–2.

⁸ Edwin Ride, *BAAG: Hong Kong Resistance 1942–1945* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp. 88–90 and 220.

1942, BAAG agent Francis Lee (李耀標) was sent to Hong Kong by J. D. Clague (祈德尊), the commander of the BAAG AHQ in Huizhou, to make contact with Tsoi Kwok Leung. After discussions, BAAG and the Brigade agreed to set up three posts, namely Post Y at “Tin Shui Lau Fong”, Post X at Sha Yue Chung (沙魚涌) in the present-day Shenzhen and Post Z at Portland Street in Kowloon for liaison purposes.⁹

Post Y was housed on the upper floor of “Tin Shui Lau Fong”. Its main purpose was to collect information and intelligence reports from BAAG agents in Hong Kong for the BAAG AHQ in Huizhou. “Tin Shui Lau Fong” was probably selected by the BAAG because it was just a few minutes’ walk from the Brigade’s base in the Holy Family Chapel, allowing convenient communication and the exchange of information between the two units. Post Y thus also served as a liaison point between the BAAG and the Brigade.¹⁰ Working with the Brigade in Chek Keng, the BAAG helped escapees from POW camps to leave Hong Kong, while the BAAG also provided training for the nurses attached to the Brigade.¹¹ To reduce the risk of detection, BAAG agents deployed to Post Y were of Chinese or Eurasian descent. Alongside Francis Lee, they also included Osler Thomas (譚藹勵),¹² who had studied western medicine and assisted the Brigade’s nurses, when requested, in

⁹ E. M. Ride (comp.), “B.A.A.G. Series, Volume IV, Advance Headquarters, Waichow - Field Operations Group” (Printed and distributed by Special Collections, The University of Hong Kong, 2006), pp. ii and 190,

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Rxxh1B_8qICTGZAzRuukv6Tzy4NSNA-e/view, accessed on 20 September 2024; and E. M. Ride (comp.), “B.A.A.G. Series, Volume VI, Field Intelligence and Contact with the Captives” (Printed and distributed by Special Collections, The University of Hong Kong, 2006), p.31,

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1gQw6HDSg61nUbmX4ff4gEng08OxquGpW/view>, accessed on 1 November 2024.

¹⁰ E. M. Ride (comp.), “B.A.A.G. Series, Volume IV, Advance Headquarters, Waichow - Field Operations Group” (Printed and distributed by Special Collections, The University of Hong Kong, 2006), pp.161-163,

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Rxxh1B_8qICTGZAzRuukv6Tzy4NSNA-e/view, accessed on 20 September 2024; Edwin Ride, *BAAG: Hong Kong Resistance 1942–1945* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1981), p.215.

¹¹ 麥雅貞：〈在港九大隊衛生隊的日子裏〉，載廣東婦女運動歷史資料編輯委員會編：《香港婦女運動資料匯編（1937年–1949年）》（廣州：廣東婦女運動歷史資料編輯委員會，1994年），頁125； E. M. Ride (comp.), “B.A.A.G. Series, Volume V, Advance Headquarters, Waichow – Medical Post” (Printed and distributed by Special Collections, The University of Hong Kong, 2006), p.ii. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/174bzMeoZI6pEGep7culGxFjmFw0njOi6/view>, accessed on 20 September 2024.

¹² Osler Thomas was a fourth-year medical student from the University of Hong Kong who was attached to the Field Ambulance Unit of the HKVDC under Lindsay Ride during the Japanese invasion of Hong Kong in December 1941. After the city fell, he escaped to China, joined the BAAG and served with it until the end of the war. See Lindsay Ride, “The Test of War,” in Brian Harrison (ed.), *University of Hong Kong: The First 50 Years* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1962), p.76.

performing surgeries, for example removing bullets from the injured.¹³

The establishment of Post Y in “Tin Shui Lau Fong” was made possible by the support of two brothers of the Chiu clan, Chiu Ping Hei (趙丙喜) and Chiu Sun Hei (趙新喜), who were indigenous villagers living in the building at that time. According to an archival record, the brothers and another male member of the clan named Chiu Lin Shing (趙連勝) provided food and accommodation over a period of seven months to various members of the BAAG who passed through the village of Chek Keng while conducting work connected with escapees and fugitives. They also provided food and lodging for over 20 Indian escapees and transported escapees and members of the BAAG aiding them across Mirs Bay by junk. After the war, the three Chius were each presented with a certificate of gratitude, and a sum of HK\$1,200 was awarded to the village by the District Office.¹⁴ Other members of the Chiu clan also supported the guerrillas. Three sons of Chiu Ping Hei — Chiu Tin Fu (趙天富), Chiu Wah (趙華) and Chiu Tin Fuk (趙天福) — all joined the Brigade, while his daughter-in-law, Li Yau Ti (李有娣), mobilised the women of the village to support the guerrillas.¹⁵

The BAAG agents at Post Y in “Tin Shui Lau Fong” were protected by the guerrillas, and it was not until the latter half of 1943 that the post had to be abandoned.¹⁶ Although Post Y was in operation for less than a year, it played a significant role as a unique meeting point and base of cooperation between the Brigade and the BAAG in the War of Resistance.

“Tin Shui Lau Fong” is a grey-brick building with three bays that is constructed on a terrace with an open courtyard in front. The building is topped by a pitched roof at the front and a flat roof surrounded by parapet walls at the rear. The most distinctive feature of the building is the front façade. The name of the building, “Tin Shui Lau Fong”, in Chinese characters is embossed on a cement plaque above the main entrance in the centre, which is recessed with a pair of timber doors located in the midst of two windows. The front façade of the bays on either side also

**Architectural
Merit**

¹³ E. M. Ride (comp.), “B.A.A.G. Series, Volume V, Advance Headquarters, Waichow – Medical Post” (Printed and distributed by Special Collections, The University of Hong Kong, 2006), p.ii. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/174bzMeoZl6pEGep7culGxFjmFw0njOi6/view>, accessed on 20 September 2024.

¹⁴ HKRS178-1-5, “Papers by John Barrow, District Officer, N.T. on the Services of New Territories Villagers and Boat People During the Japanese Occupation”, 14 April 1947.

¹⁵ 劉智鵬、劉蜀永主編：《港九大隊志》（香港：商務印書館（香港）有限公司，2022年），頁169。

¹⁶ Osler Thomas, “With the BAAG in Wartime China,” in Clifford Matthews and Oswald Cheung (eds.), *Dispersal and Renewal: Hong Kong University During the War Years* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1998), pp. 308–309.

features granite pillars at the bottom corners. Granite lintels can be seen above the door and windows on the ground floor in the front façade of the middle and left bays. The windows are rectangular in shape and most of them are fitted with security bars. The two windows on the ground floor of the left bay are adorned with semi-circular hood mouldings, adding to the building's distinctive appearance. The bay on the right of the main entrance has been installed with an additional steel door between its two windows on the ground floor.

The building is rectangular in plan and divided into three bays internally by walls with doorways to allow passage between the bays; for now, however, the doorways between the middle and right bays on both floors have been blocked up. The upper flooring of the front section is constructed with timber planks laid over timber joists, while a timber staircase provides access from the ground floor. The cockloft on the first floor of the left bay is believed to have been used for storing grain in the past. There are two doorways on the first floor that lead out on to the flat roof at the rear. While the flat roof is constructed with reinforced concrete, the traditional Chinese pitched roof laid with clay tiles in Hakka style, which are supported by timber rafters and purlins, still retains in the middle and left bays of the building.

The building remains largely intact, although minor alterations can be observed in the bay on the right. For example, its external wall has been whitewashed, a modern stainless steel door has been installed at its entrance, the front façade windows have been altered and the original clay tiles on the roof have been replaced with sheet metal. With the exception of these changes, which are mainly confined to one of the three bays, the building has generally retained much of its authenticity. Very few villagers currently reside in Chek Keng, and most of the houses have been left vacant and dilapidated. “Tin Shui Lau Fong” is still intact, however, and remains one of the best-preserved houses in the area.

Authenticity & Rarity

“Tin Shui Lau Fong” is a local landmark that is deeply embedded in the collective memory of the surrounding community. It once housed Post Y of the BAAG, an intelligence centre and liaison point protected by the Brigade, which underlines Chek Keng's importance as an operating base of the underground resistance forces during the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression. The building stands as testimony to the enduring legacy of the members of the Chiu family, the BAAG agents and the Brigade personnel, who all played a key role in many rescue operations, joining hands to resist the Japanese invasion and making an important contribution to the victory in the war.

Social Value & Local Interest

Geographically, the building is in close vicinity of the Holy Family Chapel (Grade 2), which was the operating base of the Brigade during the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression. Two other chapels in Sai Kung also played a role in the War of Resistance, including the Rosary Mission Centre in Wong Mo Ying (Grade 2), where the Brigade announced its establishment, and the Immaculate Conception Chapel in Tai Long (大浪) (Grade 3), where the guerrillas lived for a short period of time after the Japanese army left the area at the end of the Second World War. ***Group Value***

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