

Historic Building Appraisal
Pound Lane Public Toilet and Bathhouse,
Sai Ying Pun, Hong Kong

The existing Pound Lane Public Toilet and Bathhouse (磅巷公廁及浴室) was built at the junction of Pound Lane and Tai Ping Shan Street (formerly known as Taipingshan Street, 太平山街) in 1961, on the site of an earlier bathhouse. The old bathhouse was built in 1904 in response to the outbreak of a Bubonic Plague in May 1894 in Taipingshan District, which was where the early Chinese population lived, and it was demolished in the late 1950s. *Historical Interest*

It is thought that the English name of “Pound Lane” was derived from the existence of a government pound, or place where strayed cattle and so forth, or animals due for quarantine or confiscation, were kept.¹ Apart from the government pound, livestock such as pigs, cows and goats were also raised in buildings on Pound Lane and in its vicinity. Such animals were kept in shops, dwelling houses or shop-cum-dwelling houses. In April 1874, the Colonial Surgeon, Dr. Ph. B. C. Ayres, completed a report on the sanitary condition of the town of Victoria. It was observed that pigs were commonly kept in the houses all over the town. In houses including those on Pound Lane and in its vicinity, pigs were kept in kitchens, gullies at the back of houses and even under beds.

The unhygienic conditions in dwellings of ordinary Chinese residents were also described by Ayres in his Annual Report of the Colonial Surgeon for the year 1879, in which he described dwellings that in general lacked pure air, pure water, purity from damp, pure light and equable temperature. Ayres also believed that the Chinese population seldom bathed or washed due to the inconvenience and expense of getting water. In the Original Annual Report of the Colonial Surgeon for the year 1874, Ayres wrote:

Women of the lowest class rarely wash themselves; men, only the exposed parts of their persons. I have seen many women who have candidly confessed that they have not even wiped themselves down with a damp cloth (which is the Chinese mode of washing) for years, and I saw no reason to doubt their

¹ Regarding the name “磅巷” in Chinese, it is said that the English pronunciation of “pound” sounds similar to the pronunciation of “磅” in Cantonese, while “巷” is lane in Chinese.

words. If any washing is done, either of bodies or clothes, it is generally done in the kitchen... The average quantity of water used daily by each individual is about two quarts, and this is considered sufficient, as a rule, for cooking, drinking and washing purposes. Often it has to be brought from a considerable distance, and this is troublesome and expensive, so they do with as little as possible.

Chinese dwellings were built with neither toilets nor bathrooms.² It was not until 1867, following the outbreaks of cholera between 1865 and 1866, that the government began to provide public privies. However, it was difficult for the government to find land to accommodate privies at convenient locations, and government facilities were therefore outnumbered by private ones established by businessmen, who regarded them as collection points for night soil to be sold as fertilizers to Mainland China.³ With regard to bathhouses, only a small number of private baths can be identified from rates records.⁴ It was not until the early 1880s when Governor Sir John Pope Hennessy was in office (1877 – 1882) that the government considered building public bathhouses, with a supply of warm water, for the Chinese, and hoped that further private ones charging an extremely moderate fee could be built. In fact, both the local Chinese and government officials were apathetic concerning housing and sanitary reforms. They were anxious about the costs that might be incurred and the potential need for increased taxation and rent. Neither of Hennessy's successors – Governor Sir George Bowen (1883 – 1885) and Governor Sir William Des Voeux (1887 – 1891)⁵ – achieved any significant improvements in the sanitation of Taipingshan District. In 1893, after a house inspection tour of the district Colonial Surgeon Ayres was dismayed to observe that the terrible living conditions of the poor Chinese there remained unchanged from those he had reported upon twenty years previously.

² Ayres conducted inspections to the brothels in the Chinese community between 1873 and 1874. It was observed that generally there were in the kitchens one or more hutches used in as privies. Those hutches were composed of a few boards knocked together to form a screen, and from age and neglect they were saturated with filth. There were no proper containers for night soil in the hutches (sometimes a broken pot, sometimes a leaky old tub, sometimes nothing at all). Or men went to public privies, while women and children used covered pots, which were kept under their beds. Ayres stated that the very poor condition of the privies in brothels was equally applicable to private houses.

³ For instance, only one public privy operated by the government on Pound Lane but around 10 privately-run public privies can be identified from the rates records of Taipingshan District from 1868 to 1894.

⁴ For instance, only two private bathhouses on Pound Lane can be identified from the rates records of Taipingshan District from 1868 to 1894.

⁵ Hong Kong was ruled by Officers Administering the Government, namely Sir William Henry Marsh (1885 – 1887) and William Gordon Cameron (April – October 1887) before the arrival of Des Voeux.

The very poor sanitation in Taipingshan District led to an outbreak of Bubonic Plague there in May 1894.⁶ To prevent the recurrence of such epidemic diseases, “The Taipingshan Resumption Ordinance” was enacted in September 1894, aimed at facilitating improvement works within the resumed area. On 26 September 1894, a 6.25 acre area of private property, which was bounded by Taipingshan Street, Square Street (四方街), Ladder Street (樓梯街), Caine Road (堅道), Po Yan Street (普仁街), Rutter Street (律打街) and Pound Lane (磅巷), was resumed. The buildings in Taipingshan Street, Market Street (街市街) (today’s Po Hing Fong, 普慶坊), Upper Station Street (差館上街), Square Street, Bridges Street (必列者士街) and Tank Lane (水池巷) as well as the then Taipingshan Market were pulled down by the government between August and October 1895.

The improvement works also included the construction of a public bathhouse at the junction of Pound Lane and Taipingshan Street on the present site of the Pound Lane Public Toilet and Bathhouse. The site was originally occupied by several privately-owned houses, which were subsequently resumed by the government. The bathhouse, which opened in 1904, was the first permanent public bathhouse for both men and women free of charge.⁷ Also within the resumed area, a public latrine was constructed at the junction of Tank Lane and Bridges Street,⁸ while the Bacteriological Institute (now a Declared Monument known as the Old Pathological Institute) was built on Caine Lane near the top of Ladder Street.

In response to the influx of refugees and rapid increase in population in Hong Kong after the Second World War, the pre-war Pound Lane public bathhouse was demolished and redeveloped into the existing multi-storey toilet-cum-bathhouse in 1961. At present, it is known as the Pound Lane Public Toilet and Bathhouse.

The existing building was constructed on a prominent corner site, with its main facade facing onto Pound Lane and its flank walls facing Tai Ping Shan Street and Po Yee Street. It is of three stories in height, including a semi-basement as part of the ground floor, which was made necessary due to the steeply sloping site. Adjoining the toilet-cum-bathhouse is a temple

***Architectural
Merit***

⁶ Bubonic plague broke out in Taipingshan District again in 1896.

⁷ Temporary bathhouses were established before permanent bathhouse buildings could be constructed.

⁸ This latrine was later demolished and the land on which it was once situated became part of the Chinese Y.M.C.A. of Hong Kong (Central Building) at No. 51 Bridges Street (built in 1918).

named Kwong Fook I Tsz (廣福義祠). Female Toilet and Bathroom are housed on G/F, Male Toilet on 1/F, Male Bathroom and the office area (formerly the Caretaker's Quarters and Pump Room) on 2/F. The design is strictly functional and contains very little decoration either externally or internally. The main structure has reinforced concrete walls and a flat roof, and there are small square-shaped windows spaced at regular intervals on the elevation.

The Pound Lane Public Toilet and Bathhouse is now one of the **Rarity, Built Heritage Value & Authenticity** bathhouses in operation in Hong Kong and provides a typical example of such facilities constructed shortly after the Second World War. It has provided a valuable service to the public for many years, but is now a less critical resource in the context of the modern city. Its design is very typical of functional government buildings of the 1950s to 1960s, which was a period when the emphasis was on fast, economical and efficient building construction.

During a major refurbishment around 2003, the external facades and internal finishes have been replaced with modern and more hygienic materials such as glazed tiling, and the old bathrooms were replaced with shower cubicles. An accessible toilet was also added to the open yard abutting the junction of Pound Lane and Tai Ping Shan Street. Although most of the original surface finishing, fittings and internal layout have been modernised, the basic form of the building has remained intact since 1961.

The building is situated in one of the earliest residential areas of the **Social Value & Local Interest** Chinese population on Hong Kong Island. It therefore contributes to the long and rich social history of the local community, their lives and the hardships they experienced, from the dangerous years of the Plague to the time of rapid housing development in the 1950s and 1960s, on through periods of prosperity and development, until the present day, with all its nearby modern public facilities. Like the other bathhouses in Hong Kong, the Pound Lane Public Toilet and Bathhouse is still important for people who live without or with inadequate bathing facilities. Its history thus provides a continuing link to the lives of local people in the district.

Pound Lane Public Toilet and Bathhouse has group value with other **Group Value** historic buildings and structures in its vicinity, including the Pound Lane Steps (new item for grading assessment), Main Block of Tung Wah Hospital (Grade 1), Kwong Fook I Tsz (廣福義祠) (Grade 2), the former quarters for

scavenging coolies at No. 4 Hospital Road (醫院道 4 號) (Grade 2), Man Mo Temple on Hollywood Road (荷李活道文武廟) (Declared Monument) and Ladder Street (樓梯街) (Grade 1). They testify to the early development of the Chinese community in Sheung Wan and continue to serve the daily needs of the local community.

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Historic Building Appraisal

Steps of Prince's Terrace, Mid-Levels, Hong Kong

Prince's Terrace is a privately-owned pedestrianised street, although it is open for public use. It was officially named “太子台” in Chinese and “Prince's Terrace” in English in the 1923 Gazette Notice. It is said that the street was named as such probably as a tribute to the Royal family, and Royal visits to Hong Kong.¹ According to the 1923 Gazette Notice, Prince's Terrace is the “road commencing at the South-west boundary of Inland Lot No. 152 in Peel Street and running in a south-easterly direction and terminating at its junction with Shelley Street being parallel to and immediately South-west of Caine Road”.² The location and boundary of this Inland Lot No. 152 (I.L. 152) can be identified from a land record dating from 1921. Today, this plot of land is composed of a number of sub-divided lots. The granite steps we see today mainly fall within the lots occupied by Nos. 17 and 19 Prince's Terrace. Their history can be traced back to 1885 – 1886 or perhaps even earlier.

*Historical
Interest*

A “French Convent” situated on two plots of land on Caine Road, namely I.L. 151 and I.L. 152A, on Caine Road, was marked on a plan dated 1889, which is the earliest record of the kind available. A stairway leading from Peel Street to the side entrance of the convent on I.L. 152A is also identifiable on this plan. In 1890, I.L. 151 and I.L. 152A were sold by Douglas Lapraik to the Society of the Missions Etrangères.³ It was then used as the headquarters of the society until it moved to No. 1 Battery Path (now a Declared Monument known as the former French Mission Building) near St. John's Cathedral in Central around 1917.⁴

Having said that, although a French convent existed on I.L. 151 and I.L. 152A from 1890 to around 1917, a property named “Douglas Villas” was

¹ “Old Hongkong”, *South China Morning Post*, dated 29 January 1934. While “Royal visits” are not specified in this newspaper article, it is learnt from a Gazette Notice of 1922 that Prince of Wales (later King Edward VIII and after abdication the Duke of Windsor) made his Royal visit to Hong Kong in April that year.

² Gazette Notice No. 567, *Hongkong Government Gazette*, 28 December 1923.

³ The society was also known as French Procuration of the Mission Etrangères de Paris, Missions Etrangères de Paris and the French Society of Foreign Missions.

⁴ According to the directories of 1891 to 1917, the society owned two properties in Hong Kong at that time. One was this convent used as the procure of the society. The other one was the Bethanie (Declared Monument) in Pok Fu Lam, which was completed in 1875 by the society as its first sanatorium in East Asia where sick missionaries could recover from tropical diseases before returning to their work. While the building at No. 1 Battery Path was built by the society in 1917 to house its procure, the convent on Caine Road, according to rates records, was only sold to an individual between 1920 and 1921.

marked in the same location on the maps of 1897 and 1901 instead. This mansion and the convent (including the steps) had the same configuration, thus indicating that they were the same building. The magnificence of the building was recorded in a historical photo. According to the rates records between 1885 and 1886, Douglas Villas was owned by Douglas Lapraik & Co. and occupied by W. Wotton.⁵ Since these are the earliest available rates records for Douglas Villas, the associated stairway we still see today should date back to the period 1885 – 1886 or perhaps even earlier. Although it was sold to the Society of the Missions Etrangères in 1890 and redeveloped between 1922 and 1923, Douglas Villas was still remembered in the 1930s.

The surviving granite steps are composed of two main flights of steps separated by a landing, which is also constructed of granite slabs. The final platform of the stairway is in Peel Street. The balustrades on both sides of the stairway are made of grey brickwork rendered with lime plaster. There are four piers supporting the balustrade wall on each side, and the three pairs on the lower and intermediate levels are made of grey brickwork rendered with lime plaster or cement mortar. The pier at the top of the steps near Nos. 12 and 14 Prince’s Terrace is built of granite in Classical Revival style and has a finely carved capstone. The two old retaining walls which support this stairway also still exist.

***Architectural
Merit***

The granite steps are in fair condition but some of the edges or nosings of the granite treads have been broken. The stucco on the balustrade walls is also in a poor state of repair. One of the retaining walls remains in its original condition, while the other has been concealed by ornamental tiles. Unfortunately, the capstone of the granite pier was dislodged by a tree, which collapsed in August 2017 when a typhoon signal No. 10 (Typhoon Hato) (天鴿) was hoisted.

Flights of steps like these are not rare on Hong Kong Island. Due to the hilly terrain, there are many streets with steps. Prince’s Terrace is now bordered by modern buildings on both sides of the street. All the buildings are high-rise with residential flats on upper floors and several of the ground floor units are used for commercial purposes, including art galleries and a café. As the surviving granite steps and pier in Prince’s Terrace are component parts of

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

⁵ Douglas Lapraik (1818 – 1869) came to the Far East in 1839 and arrived in Hong Kong around 1842. He founded the Hong Kong and Whampao Dock Company Ltd., and was the donor of the Pedder Street Clock Tower which remained a local landmark from 1862 to 1913. His legacy endures in the names of a street, a lane, and a building. Douglas Street and Douglas Lane are named after him. He built a mansion called “Douglas Castle” (now being used as University Hall of The University of Hong Kong and a Declared Monument) where he lived for years.

an old residence known as “Douglas Villas”, which eventually became the headquarters of the Society of the Missions Etrangères, it can be said that they provide historical continuity and have some built heritage value. Although the stairway had some unsuitable repairs done over the years, most of the steps are still basically in their original and authentic condition.

The flights of steps provide direct access from Peel Street to Prince’s Terrace. They are also often used by pedestrians and local residents, including those living in Mosque Street (摩羅廟街) and Mosque Junction (摩羅廟交加街) who want to reach Central via Peel Street and then cut through Prince’s Terrace to the lower section of Shelley Street (些利街), instead of using the top end of Shelley Street, which is considered rather steep. The use of the steps and terrace as a place for location-filming is still fondly remembered by local residents.⁶ The steps therefore have some social value. Due to their classical appearance, they can also be said to have some local interest.

***Social Value
& Local
Interest***

The flights of steps in Prince’s Terrace have group value with an important group of religious and residential buildings in the area around Caine Road and Shelley Street; for example, Kom Tong Hall (甘棠第) (Declared Monument), Jamia Mosque (清真寺) (Grade 1), The Hong Kong Catholic Cathedral of The Immaculate Conception (聖母無原罪主教座堂) (Grade 1) and Sacred Heart Chapel (聖心教堂) (Grade 1).

Group Value

⁶ For instance, a television episode named “鴨仔里春光” was shot at the steps and terrace in the early 1980s and is still fondly remembered by some of the residents there. The advertisement of an insurance company was also shot there in 2018.

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