

## Historic Building Appraisal

### No. 95 Kat Hing Back Street, Tai O, Lantau Island

#### *Historical Interest*

The house at No. 95 Kat Hing Back Street was built in 1945 by Lam Kiu-shing (林橋勝, 1888-1960) as a home for his family. Lam had established a net stake fishing business (繒棟捕魚) in Shiqi (石岐) in Zhongshan (中山), his birthplace, but at some time before the 1930s he decided to look for more productive fishing grounds and moved with his family and fishing crew to Tai O, where he set up a company called “Sun Fat Lei Net Stake Fishing” (新發利繒棟) in a bay known locally as “Kat Jat Tau” (甲由頭, literally cockroach’s head) in Sha Lo Wan (沙螺灣) on Lantau Island. According to official documents in the possession of the Lam family, Lam Kiu-shing rented the lot on which No. 95 is situated on 17 July 1939 and built a wooden hut (木寮) there. He then purchased the lot on 23 December 1944 and redeveloped the wooden hut into the existing brick building (磚屋) in 1945. The bricks were salvaged from derelict buildings, while the floor joists of the upper floor verandah were taken from abandoned fishing vessels.

This building at No. 95 Kat Hing Back Street served exclusively as the Lam residence. The living room and bedrooms of the families of Lam Kiu-shing and Lam Mau-yin (林茂然, the youngest son) were on the ground floor, while the families of Lam Mau-choi (林茂財, the eldest son), Lam Mau-on (林茂安, the second son) and Lam Chi-chuen (林志泉, Lam Kiu-shing’s grandson) lived on the upper floor. About 15 family members lived in the house in total. The inscription 大澳甲由頭新發利繒棟寓 on a wooden plaque in the house literally means “Residence of the net stake fishing business of Tai O’s Sun Fat Lei at Kat Jat Tau”, telling us what the building was used for as well as the name and location of Lam’s fishing business. Net stake fishing involves setting up a linear (一字排) wall of nets held up by wooden stakes driven into the seabed. Fish and shrimps swim into the nets following the tidal current (水流) and trapped in the nets when the tide falls. The fishing crew would then fasten the nets to harvest.<sup>1</sup> The fishing business in Tai O before the 1950s was mainly practised in shallow waters by fishing boats, whereas net stake fishing can only be carried out in deep bays.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, most of the fishermen in Hong Kong used fishing vessels without fixed locations of fishing which in turn enhanced flexibility.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, net stake fishing was rare in Hong Kong.

<sup>1</sup> Oral history interview with the Lam family conducted by the Antiquities and Monuments Office on 26 August 2021.

<sup>2</sup> 「漁農自然護理署」, 「大澳海域的漁業文化特色」  
<[https://www.hktraveler.com/HKFish\\_to2013/edu\\_characteristic.htm](https://www.hktraveler.com/HKFish_to2013/edu_characteristic.htm)>, accessed on 12 November 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Oral history interview with Professor Liu Tik-sang, Director of South China Research Center, The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology on 1 December 2021.

Behind the house are a well and some cultivated land. The Lam family carried out work to prepare the net stake fishing operations — washing, steaming and repairing the nets for example — in the open space to the right of the house. The family also farmed the land behind the house on a small scale, mainly growing crops for themselves, but they also sold any surplus at the local market. The stilt houses in front of No. 95 Kat Hing Back Street provided accommodation for part of the fishing crew as well as a storage area for tools and a working space for making and repairing fishing nets.<sup>4</sup>

The fishing business continued to operate during the Japanese Occupation (1941-1945),<sup>5</sup> but started to fall into decline in the 1950s, and the younger Lam generations began leaving Tai O to pursue other job and educational opportunities in the city. Nevertheless, the building at No. 95 remained the residence of some family members up to the early 1970s. From that time on, some would occasionally come to the house for a short stay at weekends or on holidays. Today, the descendants of the late Lam Kiu-shing still treasure the house as the invaluable legacy of their great grandfather, regarding it as their ancestral home (祖屋) and often coming to visit. Annexed to the house is a kitchen where daily meals and also food such as rice cakes for Chinese New Year and other festivals were prepared.

The design of the two-storey house is based on a rectangular one-hall-three-bay plan with a verandah on the upper floor. The cornice eaves feature plaster mouldings of horizontal lines. The pitched roof, made of pan and roll tiles and wooden purlins and rafters, is supported by brick walls and columns.<sup>6</sup> The verandah is built of timber. Its flooring was finished with cement screeding during repairs some years ago. The strip of land below the verandah is laid with Canton floor tiles. Most of the original timber doors and windows, window sills and canopies as well as the security bars across the windows have been retained. *Architectural Merit*

In the interior, two brick columns mark the three-bay layout. On the ground floor, the floor is finished with cement screeding. The front section was used as a living room, while the rear housed the bedrooms of Lam Kiu-shing and Lam Mau-yin, which were enclosed by timber partitions and lattices. A timber partition in Lam Mau-yin's bedroom is adjoined by a flight of balustraded timber steps. On

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<sup>4</sup> The fishing crew comprised about 20 deckhands. Some of them lived in the stilt houses in front of No. 95 and some on the fishing vessels berthed at the net stakes.

<sup>5</sup> The older generations of the Lam family saw Japanese soldiers patrolling the streets and drinking water in the kitchen of No. 95.

<sup>6</sup> Red bricks and grey ones are generally identified on the ground floor and the upper floor respectively, with some locations showing a mixed use of the two.

the upper floor, the flooring is made of timber planks supported on corbels and timber joists. An ancestral shrine (祖龕) was placed in the centre in the past, flanked on either side by the bedroom of Lam Mau-choi on the left and the bedrooms of Lam Mau-on and Lam Chi-chuen on the right. The latter are enclosed by timber partitions. In front of the shrine was a timber strip panel, from which the family could watch over the main entrance.

The rear part of the one-storey kitchen is a red-brick structure with brick stoves, a chimney, a worktable and a water tank. Part of the pitched roof built of clay tiles and timber purlins and rafters has collapsed. The front part is a timber structure where the Lams stored firewood and ground rice. Traces of a rice grinder can still be identified here.

No. 95 Kat Hing Back Street is a rare village house, much of which remains highly authentic, in Tai O. It has frequently attracted the attention of visitors and social media and has also been used as a filming location.<sup>7</sup>

***Social Value & Local Interest***

No. 95 Kat Hing Back Street is within walking distance of other historic buildings in Tai O, including the Yeung Hau Temple (楊侯古廟) at Po Chue Tam (寶珠潭) (Declared Monument), the Kwan Tai Temple (關帝古廟, Grade 2), the Tin Hau Temple (天后古廟, Grade 3), Shek Lun Kok (石麟閣, Grade 3), Wing Hing Petrol Station (永慶火油倉, Grade 3) and the Old Tai O Police Station (舊大澳警署, Grade 2).

***Group Value***

No. 95 Kat Hing Back Street is a rare brick and timber structure in Tai O. Having retained a high degree of its authenticity, it is a very good example of a village house. No significant alterations have been made to the original fabric and the building structure has basically been left unaltered (with the exception of the cement screeding on the verandah's timber planking). The timber joists of the verandah, which were taken from abandoned fishing vessels, provide an invaluable reminder of Tai O's history as a fishing community.

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

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<sup>7</sup> Productions that have used the building as a location include the 1992 film *Three Summers* (《哥哥的情人》), also known as 《三個夏天》) starring Tony Leung (梁朝偉).

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**Historic Building Appraisal**  
**Staff Quarters of the Old Tai Po District Office (North),**  
**No. 20 Wan Tau Kok Lane, Tai Po, N.T.**

Also known as the “Clerks’ Quarters”, the Staff Quarters of the Old Tai Po District Office (North) (舊北區理民府職員宿舍) at No. 20 Wan Tau Kok Lane (運頭角里) at the foot of Flagstaff Hill (旗杆山) was built from 1921 to 1922. After taking control of the New Territories in 1899, the British Government established its administrative centre for the area at Flagstaff Hill, and a cluster of important government buildings was erected on the hill and in its vicinity, including the Old Tai Po Police Station (舊大埔警署, declared monument), which was constructed towards the top of the hill in 1899, the Old District Office (North) (舊北區理民府, declared monument), which was built at the top of the hill around 1907,<sup>1</sup> Island House, which was built at Yuen Chau Tsai (前政務司官邸, declared monument) in 1906,<sup>2</sup> and the Old Police Bungalow (舊警察宿舍, Grade 2), which was built on the opposite hill in 1909.<sup>3</sup>

**Historical  
Interest**

The tender for the construction of the Clerks’ Quarters to the southeast of the original quarters was closed on 6 September 1921 and the contract was awarded to Yeung Fat (楊發, 1856–1938)<sup>4</sup> later the same year. The foundation works were finished and the brickwork commenced by the end of 1921. Construction was completed in 1922.

Comprising five units and marked “District Office Quarters” on maps from 1962, 1966 and 1970, the building was used as staff quarters until the early 1970s. To ease the cramped conditions in the District Office (North), the quarters were

<sup>1</sup> The Old Tai Po Police Station was built in 1899 as the first police station in the New Territories and served as the police headquarters for the region. The flag-raising ceremony that marked the British takeover of the New Territories was held on Flagstaff Hill at the site of the station, which thus bore witness to the establishment of British colonial rule in the New Territories. It is also the oldest surviving police station in the New Territories and remained in operation until the new Tai Po district police station came into service in 1987.

The District Office (North) was built around 1907 and was the earliest seat of the civil administration for the New Territories after they were leased to Britain. The building was home to the government administration and the land registration office for the northern part of the New Territories, and it also housed a magistrate’s court until 1961. The district office was shut in 1983.

<sup>2</sup> Island House, located in Yuen Chau Tsai, previously served as the residence of government officials.

<sup>3</sup> The Old Police Bungalow served as the residence of the divisional superintendent of the New Territories (新界分區警司).

<sup>4</sup> Originally from Wuhua (五華) in Meizhou (梅州), Yeung Fat, also known as Yeung Fat-lee (楊發利) or Yeung Ping-yuen (楊秉元), came to Hong Kong to seek new opportunities. Following in the footsteps of his fellow Hakka natives, he became a stonemason and construction worker and, after several years of hard work, he eventually set up his own company, Yeung Fat & Co. (發利建築), which became a major contractor for the Hong Kong government, working on projects such as roads, barracks, drainage, cemeteries, reservoirs and fire stations. In 1930, for example, the company was responsible for the maintenance of the roads in the New Territories and the supply of labour and materials for the Chinese Cemeteries in Hong Kong and Kowloon, while in 1937 it was awarded the contracts for the permanent draining of the stream courses in Pok Fu Lam and the areas around the Aberdeen Reservoirs.

converted into an office annexe housing several sections of the land office in 1974. This office mainly comprised field staff members who were frequently out on duty, and so the offices were not in constant use every day. Marked as a “District Sub-office” on maps from 1979, 1981 and 1983, the building gradually gave up this function after field offices were set up in Sheung Shui and Sha Tin in the 1970s. The District Lands Office (North) vacated the building sometime around October 1984.<sup>5</sup> From 1985 to the early 1990s, Unit No. 1 of the building was used by the Transport Department as its Parking Meter Maintenance Depot, while Unit Nos. 2 to 5 were taken over by the Hong Kong Police Force to house its Traffic New Territories North Headquarters.

In the early 1990s, the building was allocated to the former Regional Services Department (“RSD”), which converted it into a laboratory and store for its museum section. Following the dissolution of the Regional Council and the Urban Council, the management of the building was transferred in 2000 to the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (“LCSD”), which had been established earlier that year. The building currently houses the stores of Hong Kong Science Museum (Unit No. 1), Conservation Office (Unit Nos. 2 and 3) and Hong Kong Space Museum (Unit Nos. 4 and 5) of LCSD.

The two-storey Staff Quarters of the Old Tai Po District Office (North) *Architectural Merit* comprised five units. According to government records, the building was a brickwork construction with double roll and pan tile roofs. There were two living rooms on both the ground and upper floors of each unit, while the rear section housed a kitchen, bathhouse and latrine roofed with reinforced concrete slabs. There was an enclosed yard at the back.

The design of the building demonstrates the influence of the Arts and Crafts movement. The surfaces of the walls of the front sections and the boundary wall enclosing the backyard on the ground floor are built of fair-faced red brickwork laid in English bond with alternate courses of stretchers and headers, while those on the upper level are plastered and painted in creamy white. The fair-faced brickwork windowsills feature a curved profile, while the painted door and window lintels bear chamfered details. Colonial architectural features, including the verandah on the front façade and the balconies on the right (northeast) elevation with metal balustrades can still be identified. Concrete brackets on the granite spreaders in the brick walls support the cantilevered verandah on the front façade and the balconies

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<sup>5</sup> The Lands Department was established in April 1982 to take charge of all land matters in Hong Kong, and the District Sub-office of the District Office (North) was transferred to the department at that time.

on the side elevation.

An aerial photo dated 1967 shows that there were six chimney stacks on the tiled roof. Three emerged from the roof of the living rooms, which suggest that these rooms each had a fireplace at that time. Another three stacks were on the rear side of the front block and are believed to have served the kitchens. However, the one at the rear of Unit No. 5 has been removed, meaning that only five of the chimney stacks have been retained. The chimney breast with a tapered profile on the right elevation (the external side wall of Unit No. 1) is finished in fair-faced brickwork. The chimney breasts at the rear feature a straight profile and have been painted.

In the interior, the building generally retains its original layout as a row of five residential units. Each of them has a front block that originally housed the living rooms, but which has now been converted into two store rooms on the ground floor and two offices/stores on the upper floor, and a rear block comprising three rooms that were originally the kitchen, bathhouse and latrine. Unit No. 1 is the most authentic amongst the five. For instance, several wooden doors and windows and metal grilles remain in place. Moreover, four fireplaces can still be identified in the four former living rooms. One of the fireplaces on the ground floor features elaborate Art Nouveau motifs on the hood, the other three are decorated with lozenge motifs. A timber mantel shelf can also be seen above one of the fireplaces. In addition, the original black or white cement floor tiles in the former living rooms on the ground floor and some reddish wall and floor tiles in the former bathhouse and latrine with granite door thresholds have been retained. In the only surviving open courtyard of the building, features of the cantilevered canopy that extended from the roof of the former kitchen, bathhouse and latrine and was supported on concrete brackets are now evident only at Unit No. 1.

According to government records, Unit 1's flooring on the upper floor was built of reinforced concrete and was originally finished with grooved and tongued floor boarding. It had been covered by vinyl floor tiles. The original wooden staircase in the living room has also been replaced by a metal one. Despite these changes, the overall authenticity of Unit No. 1 has been retained, and it is the most authentic amongst the five.

According to government records, the other units (Unit Nos. 2 to 5) underwent renovations and alterations starting in the early 1990s. For instance, all the flooring of the original living rooms was covered by vinyl floor tiles. A new doorway was installed in the partition wall in the backyard between Unit Nos. 2 and 3 to connect

them. Similarly, another new doorway was built in the backyard between Unit Nos. 4 and 5. In addition, this row of backyards for Unit Nos. 2 to 5 was covered with a new steel pitched roof, the walls and floors were finished with modern tiles and the external surface of the red-brick boundary wall at the rear was plastered and painted; the granite door thresholds were retained, however.

The single-storey annexe on the site was built between 1985 and 1987, according to historical maps, used as a fire services plant room, and has its original roof structure renovated with modern materials. Only the two-storey quarters is graded.

Together with the Old District Office (North), Island House, Old Tai Po Police Station and the Old Police Bungalow, the Staff Quarters are of great local interest, as they reflect the important status of Tai Po as the administrative centre of the colonial government in the New Territories. The building has retained its value, as it served as the offices for various government departments, including the Old District Office (North), the Transport Department, the Hong Kong Police Force and LCSD. It is seen in the social media and is also used as a filming location.<sup>6</sup>

***Social Value & Local Interest***

The Staff Quarters of the Old District Office (North) is located in the vicinity of other government buildings of its time. The Old District Office (North), which stood next to the Old Tai Po Police Station, took up the civil administration of the region in 1907. At the opposite hill, there is the Old Police Bungalow, which was the former residence of the Divisional Superintendent of the New Territories. The Island House, the residence of government officials is located in Yuen Chau Tsai. From the historical perspective, these buildings, if taken together, have a high group value since they symbolised the establishment of the colonial administration and mechanism in maintaining law and order, two components for the consolidation of government authority in Hong Kong

***Group Value***

The building is a rare surviving example of early government staff quarters in the New Territories. Although it has been converted for different uses in more recent times, its general layout and certain architectural features have been retained, particularly Unit No. 1, and it has thus generally maintained its authenticity.

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

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<sup>6</sup> For instance, the television drama series 《古靈精探 (I)》 and 《古靈精探 (II)》 were filmed there in 2007 and 2008 respectively.



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