

Historic Building Appraisal
Building Remains at Cochrane Street and Gutzlaff Street,
Central, Hong Kong Island

Hong Kong street names were by and large taken from British politicians, military figures and local civil servants. Cochrane Street (閣麟街) was named after Sir Thomas John Cochrane (1789-1872), Commander of the British naval forces in the Far East who flew his flag in HMS Agincourt based in Hong Kong in 1843 and left the city in 1847. Gutzlaff Street (吉士笠街) bears the name of Karl Friedrich August Gutzlaff (1803-1851), a Lutheran missionary, whose knowledge of several Chinese dialects made him a valued interpreter, magistrate, assistant secretary of Chinese affairs, and chief secretary to the Governor of Hong Kong. Cochrane Street and Gutzlaff Street which are parallel to each other and lying in the middle of the earliest developed part of Central District were laid out in the mid-1840s.

*Historical
Interest*

Trade and commerce brought prosperity to the colonial settlement (later called the City of Victoria) which in turn attracted a huge inflow of capital and people. The local Chinese tended to build flimsy huts to live wherever they could, and the area near the present-day Cochrane, Gutzlaff, Graham and Peel Streets was one of the largest areas of huts of this kind. The then Governor, Sir Henry Pottinger embarked on a removal programme which was continued by his successor, Sir John F. Davis. In 1843-1847, the hut dwellers were relocated to the area near Tai Ping Shan Street in Sheung Wan with the area south of Queen's Road Central re-plotted, new streets laid out and new lots auctioned for building development.

Today, sandwiched between a section of Cochrane Street and the back facing Gutzlaff Street, there are remains of old walls constructed of bricks and granite which are believed to be the remains of the back and party walls of ten tenement houses that may be traced back to the 1930s.

Hong Kong Tong Lau (Tenement Houses/ Tenements)

Tong Lau (唐樓), which literally means “Chinese-type houses” or “Chinese houses” or often referred to as “tenement houses”, or “tenements” in colonial records, was a collective term for dwellings of a majority of the population in pre-war and early post-war Hong Kong. The term describes a form of living in multiple dwellings within which the space is subdivided into many units let to tenants who are unable to afford anything better. The older *Tong Lau* were built in a variety of styles including back-to-back, back-to-side, back-to-lane,

back-to-street / road etc. whilst the newer ones had provision of proper bathrooms and toilets possible.¹

A great plague started in 1894 in the Tai Ping Shan area which cost many lives. In proposing measures to prevent the reoccurrence of plagues, Dr James A. Lowson, Medical Officer in charge of Epidemic Hospital, urged that amongst other things, the use of basements as domestic accommodation should be prohibited, and back-to-back houses should be demolished as soon as possible. Although nos. 25, 29 and 31 Cochrane Street were recorded to have basements in 1895, all the 10 tenements at 2, 4, 6, 8 and 10 Gutzlaff Street and 25, 27, 29, 31 and 33 Cochrane Street were recorded of having no basements according to the records of Tenancy Tribunal of 1963, 1965, 1967 and 1972.² The records of Tenancy Tribunal may have suggested that the current building remains on site are not related to the buildings of 1895.

The Public Health and Buildings Ordinance was passed in 1903 requiring every new domestic building erected on land leased after 1903 to be provided with an open space equivalent to not less than one-third of the roofed-over area of the building and a scavenging lane with a width of at least 6 feet (about 1.8 m) behind the building.

Nos. 25, 27, 29, 31 and 33 Cochrane Street (until the fire in 1878)

Inland Lot 104 was leased to Frederick James Porter, a merchant, in January 1844 and was soon divided into different portions.³ After a few

¹ Dr Phineas Ayres, a Colonial Surgeon, in his report of 1874, spoke indignantly of the Hong Kong tenements that were constructed back to back with no ventilation or natural light except from the front. Mr Osbert Chadwick, a sanitation expert continued to draw attention to the serious consequences that would arise if nothing were done to alleviate the bad sanitary condition of the city in his 1882 report. A sign of improvement came in July 1878 when the Government, in consultation with landholders, introduced a useful change in the interest of public health, i.e. to incorporate an open yard separating the kitchen from the rest of the building to allow free air ventilation into the building. The Government, in giving permission to erect verandas over Crown Land, could now demand landholders to admit certain amount of fresh air and sunlight through the open yard while trying to economise space to the utmost.

According to 'Return of Cases of Bubonic Plague' published in Hongkong Government Gazette dated 14 October 1899, amongst the around 680 tenement units infected by bubonic plague, around 55% of the units were in back to back style, 27% in back to lane style, 12 % in back to side style and less than 1% in back to street / road style.

² It was mentioned in *Hongkong Government Gazette*, 22 June 1895 that there were basements in Nos. 25, 29 and 31 Cochrane Street. But according to the demolished building case records of the Tenancy Tribunal of 1963, 1965, 1967 and 1972, all the tenements at Nos. 2, 4, 6, 8 & 10 Gutzlaff Street and 25, 27, 29, 31 & 33 Cochrane Street did not have any basement.

³ Nos. 2, 4, 6, 8 and 10 Gutzlaff Street and Nos. 25, 27, 29, 31 and 33 Cochrane Street fell on Inland Lot 104 where the Crown Lease commenced in 1844. The lot was later divided into Section A, which consisted of Nos. 2, 4, 6, 8 and 10 Gutzlaff Street, and Sections B, C, D, E and Remaining Portion (R.P.), which covered Nos. 25, 27, 29, 31 and 33 Cochrane Street.

ownership changes, the land lot which covered Nos. 25, 27, 29, 31 and 33 Cochrane Street were acquired by Douglas Lapraik (德忌利士·林柏)⁴ (1818-1869), a Scot who amassed a vast amount of wealth in Hong Kong, in 1848. After his death in 1869 and till the end of 1899, the property at Nos. 25, 27, 29, 31 and 33 Cochrane Street was kept in the estate of Douglas Lapraik deceased.

Nos. 2, 4, 6, 8 and 10 Gutzlaff Street (until the fire in 1878)

This portion of the plot of land (i.e. Section A of Inland Lot No. 104) was brought by James Bridges Endicott (詹姆斯·安德葛) (1815-1870), an American ship captain, at a cost of \$1,500 in July 1847 from Douglas Lapraik.⁵ Endicott worked for an American firm, Messrs. Russell & Co. in Canton (present-day Guangzhou) to take charge of an opium hulk, *Ruparell*. With the fortune made from the opium trade, he started his business and later became a director of the Union Dock Company in Hong Kong.

Upon his arrival in Canton around 1842, the 27-year-old Endicott entered into a relationship with a boat woman named Ng Kew (吳嬌) with whom they had three sons and two daughters although Endicott did not marry her and separated with her in 1852 when he married Miss Ann Russell from London in Macao. Women like Ng Kew were known as “protected women” historically, whom might be well-kept and left well-provided for when their “protectors” left them.⁶

Before his marriage at Macao, Endicott placed the property at Nos. 2, 4,

⁴ Douglas Lapraik came to the Far East in 1839 and arrived in Hong Kong about 1842. He founded the Hong Kong and Whampoa 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 has been declared a monument under the Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance in 1995) where for years he lived with a Chinese mistress named Kwi Lam, alias Atai whom was given a life estate of a land lot in Stanley Street on 22 June 1861 by Douglas Lapraik.

⁵ The lot where Nos. 2, 4, 6, 8 and 10 Gutzlaff Street stood was first acquired by Ong Sow at a cost of \$6,000 in December 1844. It was subsequently sold to Dougals Lapraik at \$1,400 in June 1847. Lapraik later sold the lot to James Bridges Endicott at \$1,500 in July 1847.

⁶ The presence of large numbers of foreign traders in China gave rise to the emergence of a distinct type of Chinese women who were acquired by the foreigners and living with them. These women, like Kwi Lam, alias Atai, were sizable enough to give rise to the term of “protected women” (受保護婦女/涉外婚婦) in local history. Many of the “protected women” were from the boat dwelling population along China’s southern coast whose water-life made it natural for them to get to know, to mix with and to develop extensive contact with foreigners. At times, the “protectors” made provision for their secret lovers by the creation of a Trust or the gift of real estate.

6, 8 and 10 Gutzlaff Street in trust for Ng Kew who held the property in trust. Endicott named Douglas Lapraik as trustee of his interest and a gentleman called William Scott of Ng Kew's.

After separated with Endicott, Ng Kew moved from Macao to Hong Kong and formed a business partnership with a Chinese comprador named Fung Aching whom was described as her husband in a newspaper. They got involved in property business and their relationship ended in 1856 when Fung Aching left Hong Kong. Afterwards, Ng Kew transacted business on her own account, brokered loans and became the leader of a group of single women during the 1870s. It is believed that Ng Kew lived in Nos. 8 and 10 Gutzlaff Street in 1872 and the subsequent years like 1876 - 1878. She was described as "*Hung Mo Kew*"⁷ (literally means "red-haired Akew") in the Collection Books of the Rating and Valuation Department, a name which was used to describe Gutzlaff Street as well.⁸

Ng Kew was adjudged a bankrupt on 7 March 1878, after her creditors filed lawsuits against her. Her personal belongings, including expensive furniture,⁹ were sold to meet her debts, but the property at Nos. 2, 4, 6, 8 and 10 Gutzlaff Street were still kept by her, as it had been conferred on her by a deed of trust. According to the notice to announce the bankruptcy case of Ng A-kew published on Hongkong Government Gazette on 9 June 1880, it said that "the

⁷ A Chinese in the 19th century rarely had only one name, and there is not just one way of rendering Chinese names into English, so that Ng Kew (吳嬌) is described as Ng Akew (吳亞嬌), Ong Akew, Ng A Kew or Ng A-Kew in some accounts, and again, Hung Mo Kew (紅毛嬌), Ong Mo Kew or On Mow Kew in yet other accounts. The use of the "A" to precede a given name is not uncommon, thus "Akew". At times, "Akew" was written as two words, "A Kew". Another practice was to hyphenate the two words in the name, thus "A-Kew". The difference in Eastern and English phonetics means that any one single word may be rendered differently, so "Hung Mo Kew" was also presented as "Ong Mo Kew" or "On Mow Kew". Such discrepancies in spelling were not uncommon during the 19th century, as most official papers were hand-written by clerks.

⁸ Gutzlaff Street was called by generations of Chinese as *Hung Mo Kew Kai* (紅毛嬌街), which literally means a street of red-haired (Hung Mo) women (Kew) that could also be interpreted as "Street of Western Women". Local legend had it, or at least so it was alleged, that "Western prostitutes" were active along here, which was one of the reasons advanced for the street being so called. Another interpretation is that the term "Hung Mo Kew" is a name also given to the "Western ladies" who always came here to have their shoes repaired, as Gutzlaff Street was where all the cobblers of great skill were to be found. That said, based on the latest research findings, it seems that "Hung Mo Kew Kai" might have originated from Ng Kew, alias Hung Mo Kew (which looks like an amusing nickname), who had once lived in that street. "Hung Mo Kew" might have begun as an individual style added to Ng Kew's name and later entered into formal usage in the Rate Lists of the 1860s.

⁹ The furniture of Ng Kew was described as "Canton-made Blackwood Marble-top Tables, Chairs, and Stools, Blackwood Carved Sofas, Chairs, and Tables. Chimney Glasses, Engravings, Pictures, Lamps, Carpets, Clocks, Bookcase, Sideboard, Crockery, Glass and Plated Ware, Vases and Ornaments, Canton-made Blackwood Bedsteads, Teakwood Wardrobes, Toilet Table and Glass, and Washstands. One Iron Safe" by *Hong Kong Daily Press* dated 29 March 1878. However, according to a statement given by H.F. Gibbons, the then Registrar of the Supreme Court of Hong Kong, on 21 October 1880, he did not seem to believe that Ng Kew was bankrupted since she was still keeping unlicensed brothels and or rented property.

age of the Bankrupt [i.e. Ng A-kew] then is believed to be about sixty”.

The fire on Christmas of 1878 and aftermath

Before the fire of 1878, the area around today's Cochrane Street, Gutzlaff Street, Graham Street and Peel Street had become a bazaar area between two European sections¹⁰ of the city and was described as the city's “marginal residence” or “in between” area for being not quite European and not quite Chinese, and consisted mainly of small shops and poorer residences populated by an ethnically mixed and polyglot group comprising Chinese and Indian tradesmen, Parsee and Muslim communities, Chinese and European prostitutes, protected women and their Eurasian children who existed on the periphery of both European and Chinese communities.

The fire broke out in Central on Christmas 1878 entirely swept away “Cochrane Street, Gutzlaff Street, Graham Street... and also portions of Stanley Street, Wellington Street, Gage Street, Lyndhurst Terrace and Hollywood Road” (*The China Mail*, 26 December 1878) making the area “a mass of tottering walls and crumbling ruins.” Orders were even given to pull down walls of destroyed houses. The whole blocks of houses at Nos. 25, 27, 29, 31 and 33 Cochrane Street and Nos. 2, 4, 6, 8 and 10 Gutzlaff Street (structures erected untold ages before) were described as “Burnt 25/26 Dec 1878” in the Rates Book for 1879 and were exempted from payment of rates for the whole year of 1879.

It is believed that John Steward Lapraik (the nephew of Douglas Lapraik deceased) had a stake in both sides of Inland Lot 104. Managing the remaining portion and serving as one of four devisees of the trust property in Section A, he enabled the two rows of houses in both sides of the land lot to be rebuilt together. In May 1879, *Daily Press* noted that houses were in progress of rebuilding in Cochrane Street. Soon afterwards, Nos. 25, 27, 29, 31 and 33 Cochrane Street and Nos. 2, 4, 6, 8 and 10 Gutzlaff Streets were liable for rates paid for the January to March quarter in 1880.

The late Rev Carl T. Smith, a renowned historian, believed that Ng Kew lived in the rebuilt houses in Gutzlaff Street after her bankruptcy in 1878 and probably until her death in 1914 when the trust was dissolved, albeit no official record is found to support the claim. However, according to the Rates Book of 1879, the owner of Nos. 2, 4, 6, 8 and 10 Gutzlaff Street which was first hand

¹⁰ The two European sections are (a) the area around Queen's Road in which most of the important banks and European business firms were established, and (b) the socially higher up residential districts in Caine, Bonham & Robinson Roads.

written as Ng Kew was crossed and rewritten as “Fung Kow”. Furthermore, as Ng Kew was about 60 when her properties were gazetted for sale in 1880 after her bankruptcy, she would have been 94 in 1914. Such life expectancy was highly uncommon in the late nineteenth century.¹¹ As such, it does not seem to be likely that Ng Kew would have lived until 1914.

At the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, foreign traders especially British taipans were to some extent eclipsed by the growth of their Chinese counterparts who went on to make fortunes¹². According to the land records, Ho Tung (何東) (later Sir Robert, comprador, financier and public benefactor) purchased the houses at Nos. 25, 27, 29, 31 and 33 Cochrane Street for \$32,000 on 27 January 1900. He then resold the houses within 1 to 9 days.¹³ On 27 October 1916, the houses at Nos. 2, 4, 6, 8 and 10 Gutzlaff Street (which were under the ownership of Robert Endicott) were sold to the 50-year-old merchant, Ho Kom Tong (何甘棠) (1866-1950) at \$50,000. Subsequently, Ho Kom Tong sold No. 2 Gutzlaff Street on 28 October, Nos. 4 and 6 on 2 November, Nos. 8 and 10 on 1 December, all in 1916.¹⁴ It is noteworthy that both Ho Tung and Ho Kom Tong merely owned the lots for only a few days to about a month according to the official land transaction records.

After the sub-division of lot numbers in 1900 and 1916, the ownership of the subject 10 tenements at Cochrane Street and Gutzlaff Street had become very diverse including both Chinese and non-Chinese.¹⁵

¹¹ According to the Chadwick’s Report dated 1882, the mean ages at death for men and women in Hong Kong (who died over 20 years of age) in 1881 were 42 and 46 respectively, and 43 in average. If the children and young people who died before 20, the average mean age of death in 1881 was 18.33.

¹² The then Governor Sir John Pope Hennessy himself testified to the economic success of the Chinese by pointing out in the Legislative Council, in May 1881, that all but one of the 18 ratepayers then possessing property assessed at over \$1,000 per quarter were Chinese – the only British firm in the race was Jardine, Matheson & Co. Sir Hennessy also noted in the Legislative Council that in the 17 months from January 1880 to May 1881 the Chinese had purchased 1.7 million dollars’ worth of real estate from foreigners, 8 times what the foreigners purchased from the Chinese.

¹³ Ho Tung sold the properties at Nos. 25, 27, 29, 31 and 33 Cochrane Street at a total cost of \$38,200, thus making a profit of around \$6,200 in 9 days.

¹⁴ Ho Kom Tong sold the houses at Nos. 2, 4, 6, 8 and 10 Gutzlaff Street at a total cost of \$63,000, making a profit of around \$13,000 in 35 days.

¹⁵ The Chinese owners of the subject tenements include Chan, Ho, Hu, Kan, Kwong, Lai, Leung, Lui, etc. and non-Chinese such as Dhunjeebhoy Sorabjee Dady Burjor (敦治寶) (merchant & commission agent, formerly of Bombay, who may have been a Parsee), Ahmet Rumjahn (艾哈邁德) (broker and estate agent, himself a Muslim from India). The Shu Pun Charitable Association, Ltd. (樹本善堂) had an office at No. 27 Cochrane Street from 1933 to 1973. The Hoseinee Society of Hong Kong (香港賀善尼會) stayed at No. 21 and 23 Cochrane Street in different times until 1965. The area had rich “in between” character up to the mid-twentieth century.

It is important to note that according to the report of Mr H. Y. Chan (陳洪業), the authorised architect commissioned by Madam Ko Wai Yung (高惠容), dated 8 November 1963 applying to demolish the then buildings at Nos. 8 and 10 Gutzlaff Street, it stated that the then buildings were built about 30 years ago, i.e. in the 1930s, and were in dilapidated condition and had extremely poor hygiene condition.¹⁶ The report was subsequently accepted by Tenancy Tribunal in 1963, which recommended to Governor in Council to approve the redevelopment of Nos. 8 and 10 Gutzlaff Street.¹⁷ The building remains currently left on site, which stretch from No. 2 to No. 10 Gutzlaff Street were homogenous in style, building materials and craftsmanship. In other words, the primary materials uncovered seem pointing towards that the buildings of the current building remains were likely to be built in the 1930s.

After World War II, the tremendous increase in population led to great demands in housing. The subject 10 tenements were exceedingly crowded with inner space subdivided to accommodate as many as 124 people (mostly adults) at No. 25 Cochrane Street in November 1965.

The tenement houses deteriorated in their conditions. On inspection in July 1972 it was found that the brickwork of some walls of the tenements in Nos. 2, 4 and 6 Gutzlaff Street was bulged and fractured; in addition, much of the structural timber was decayed and these conditions made them unfit for habitation. Much of the same situations had been identified in the tenements of the back facing Cochrane Street, which had been under observation by the Building Authority for a considerable time. The tenements were declared to be in dangerous condition and eventually demolished, redeveloped or reverted to the Crown.

In the early 1990s, the Central-to-Mid-Levels hillside escalator link was built. Now, the street space facing Nos. 25, 27, 29, 31 and 33 Cochrane Street is much wider, the ground underneath the hillside escalator is originally the parcels of ground of the tenement house fronts.

Back-to-back building was a cost-saving system of building houses between those facing in opposite directions. Those houses, therefore, shared a common back wall or attaching walls to each other at the rear as well as party walls or cross walls along the sides. The brick-built walls stand on a site

*Architectural
Merit*

¹⁶ Tenancy Tribunal Applications Nos. H.E. 1758-1763 of 1963.

¹⁷ 'Properties recommended by the Tenancy Tribunal for Exclusion from the Landlord and Tenant Ordinance', Extract From Minutes of The Executive Council dated 7 April 1964.

located on the south eastern side of Nos. 2, 4, 6, 8 and 10 Gutzlaff Street, which was originally the kitchen on the ground floor. The brickworks are remains of what were two rows of five tenements each. Also identified on site are the back-to-side wall remains of Nos. 21 and 23 Cochrane Street and Nos. 1 and 2 Yim Fong Lane. According to the records of 1942, the Gutzlaff Street tenements had a width (i.e. frontage) between 14' 11" and 15' 7½", likely governed by the normal usable length of the China fir poles, about 15 feet, used for floor joists and roof beams and a length (i.e. the depth) of 67 feet back from the street, so that the whole of the ground floor was sufficiently deep to be divided into the front part for shops, the inner part for living and sleeping, and the rear part for cooking and utility purposes.

The building remains run throughout the length of the rear parts of the subject 10 tenement units. The ceiling of the ground floor of Nos. 2, 4, 6, 8 and 10 Gutzlaff Street separates the back wall into two sections, i.e. a section of 4.3 m above the ground line of Gutzlaff Street which is the foundation of 5 houses at Cochrane Street on the one side and the kitchens of the 5 houses at Gutzlaff House on the other; and another section of 0.6 m to 0.7 m above the ground line of Cochrane Street. The walls were constructed with fair-face Chinese green bricks (青磚, or also known as "blue bricks")¹⁸ with granite as foundation. There are patches of repairs using concrete on brick and granite faces of the building remains.

The party walls are bonded into the building remains, separating each tenement from adjacent units. Corbellings with some modifications are seen at the section of party wall shared by Nos. 6 and 8 Gutzlaff Street. The bricks of the corbelling are laid in tiers arranged into a particular pattern.

A few small openings (slots) are found on the party walls at No. 6 Gutzlaff Street, which may indicate that at one time, there might be a platform or

¹⁸ Albeit the Buildings Ordinance of 1903 stipulating that blue bricks (commonly known as green bricks 青磚 in Cantonese) may not, without the approval of the Building Authority, be used in the walls of storeys other than the uppermost storey of a building or in the uppermost fifteen feet of the walls of such storey, there were cases that blue bricks were used at ground floor level. According to "Hong Kong Depositions Taken by the Magistrate Sitting as Coroner, and Finding in the Enquiry into the Deaths which Occurred in the Collapsed Houses in Cochrane Street" dated 1901 and included in *Hong Kong Sessional Papers*, No. 36 of 1901, an enquiry on the collapse of Nos. 32 and 34 Cochrane Street with around 41 people killed stated that "It had been pointed out in the evidence that the [Buildings] Ordinance required amongst other things that all walls shall be built solid, of good bricks properly bonded together, and that the lower storey must be built of red brick and so on ... (p.16)"; "... It has never been required in the case of an old building when alterations or additions are to be made that the bricks of the ground floor are to be red brick ... (p.9)", "... It is the universal practice of the Public Works Department to approve of a plan submitted by an European architect without knowing whether the foundations are good or bad ... The plans do not show whether the walls are of blue bricks or red bricks... (p.12)". As such, it was **not uncommon for ground floors of tenement buildings built after 1903 to be constructed with blue bricks.**

mezzanine floor built over part of the kitchen and used as a workplace.

It seems that the building remains and some party walls were intentionally left over during the demolition of the subject tenements to provide structural support to the adjoining sloping site of Cochrane Street. The remains of the walls and party walls had undergone substantial repairs with thick layers of concrete.

There was a variety of architectural forms of Hong Kong *Tong Lau* found on the island of the nineteenth century, e.g. tenement houses constructed in back-to-back, back-to-lane, back-to side, back-to-street / road styles etc.¹⁹ The building remains shed light on the study of tenement buildings of pre-war period.

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

The building remains lay waste over the past decades since the front and middle parts of their respective tenement houses were demolished. The condition of the building remains has to be carefully surveyed and properly consolidated if they are to be preserved *in-situ*.

The building remains provide evidence of what life was like for common people in the pre-war period, and thus demonstrates how society has moved on.

***Social Value
& Local
Interest***

The site where the subject tenement stood has certain social history of Hong Kong created by both the Chinese and expatriate communities in Hong Kong.

***Group
Value***

The wall remains could serve as a reminder of a building and living style of pre-war Hong Kong. Visitors may be interested to visit the former Central Police Station Compound (consisting three groups of declared monuments), and the shophouse units at No. 26A-C Graham Street which have been earmarked by the Urban Renewal Authority for preservation.

¹⁹. Please see footnote 1.

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Historic Building Appraisal
Former State Theatre,
J/O King's Road and Tin Chong Street, North Point, H.K.

The Empire Theatre (璇宮戲院) was opened on 11 December 1952 by Sir *Historical*
 Arthur Morse (摩士爵士) (1892–1967), Manager of the Hong Kong and *Interest*
 Shanghai Banking Corporation. It was built at a cost of HK\$2.5 million by the
 Commonwealth Enterprises Corporation, Ltd. (萬國影片公司), the Managing
 Director of which was Harry Odell (歐德禮, 1896–1975).¹ The Empire
 Theatre changed to State Theatre (皇都戲院) in 1959.

The Empire Theatre was equipped with the state-of-the-art sound and
 projection equipment, giant screen, spacious seats, air-conditioned foyer for
 patrons and back-of-stage facilities, with a capacity of 1,046 seats, and a dress
 circle with 406 seats. It was constructed in an atmosphere that there was a
 surge in the provision of large cinema halls with multi-purpose flexibility.
 There were about 20 theatres by the 1950s having over 1,000 seats, equivalent
 to the scale of the Empire Theatre.² The opening ceremony of the Empire

¹ Harry Oscar Odell arrived in Hong Kong after 1918, when he started an import-export
 business and also served as a volunteer with the Naval Reserve. He was wounded during
 the Battle of Hong Kong in 1941 and became a prisoner-of-war. At the end of the war, he
 started a film distribution business and became a Hong Kong theatre impresario. He was
 awarded Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (MBE) in 1969 in
 recognition of his contribution to Hong Kong's cultural life.

² By the 1950s, there were about 20 theatres on Hong Kong Island. Ten of them, which had
 a capacity of over 1,000 seats, were established between the late 1940s and 1950s. They
 included the Roxy Theatre (樂聲戲院) (1949–1974 with 1,713 seats), Capitol Theatre
 (京華戲院) (1952–1977 with 1,187 seats) and Hoover Theatre (豪華戲院) (1954–
 1981 with 1,483 seats) in Causeway Bay, China Theatre (中華戲院) (1948–1952 with
 1,200 seats), Globe Theatre (環球戲院) (1950–1971 with 1,158 seats), New York
 Theatre (紐約戲院) (1955–1982 with 1,409 seats) and Hong Kong Grand Theatre (香
 港大舞台) (1958–1976 with 1,243 seats) in Wan Chai, Kam Ling Theatre (金陵戲
 院) in Sai Ying Pun (1951–1973 with 1,411 seats) and Winner Theatre (永華戲院)
 (1954–? with 1,134 seats) and Golden Star Theatre (金星戲院) (1954–1972 with
 1,160 seats) in Shau Kei Wan.

In addition to these theatres, around 10 theatres, all equipped with over 1,000 seats
 respectively, and opened before the war, including the Queen's Theatre (皇后戲院)
 (1924–1958 with 1,000 seats), Ko Sing Theatre (高陞戲院) (1928–1972 with 1,722
 seats), Central Theatre (中央戲院) (1930–1971 with 1,296 seats), King's Theatre (娛
 樂戲院) (1931–1962 with 1,200 seats) and Tai Ping Theatre (太平戲院) (1932–
 1981 with 1,738 seats) in Central, Lee Theatre (利舞臺) (1927–1991 with 1,267 seats)
 in Causeway Bay, Oriental Theatre (東方戲院) (1932–1981 with 1,106 seats) and
 National Theatre (國民戲院) (1940–1973 with 1,058 seats) in Wan Chai, were still
 operating at that time.

Theatre was attended by some 1,000 guests who saw the debut Hollywood film “Just For You” (高歌艷舞樂璇宮) starring Bing Crosby (冰·哥羅士比) and Jane Wyman (珍·惠文).³

Between 1957 and 1959, a major extension was built immediately adjacent to the theatre building, comprising a multi-storey residential block, shops on G/F, a night club and a pedestrian corridor connecting the new multi-storey block with the theatre.⁴ After renovation works, the renamed “State Theatre” (皇都戲院) re-opened on 14 February 1959 with the debut movie “Spring Song” (青春兒女) starring Grace Chang (葛蘭), Lin Chui (林翠), Chen Ho (陳厚) and Chiao Hung (喬宏).

By 1950, North Point had become a popular place for entertainment, having the nickname “Little Shanghai” (小上海) as a result of the southern migration of Shanghai refugees who brought with them not only capital but also varied forms of entertainment. This created a favourable environment for the operation of the Empire Theatre and later the State Theatre. From 1960, the State Theatre showed first run English language films which were particularly more affordable⁵ and thus popular among the better-off with higher education level. Films such as Lawrence of Arabia (沙漠梟雄) and The Sound of Music (仙樂飄飄處處聞) were shown at the State Theatre. The theatre, however, faced strong competition from other similar size theatres. In October 1966, for instance, the State Theatre was ranked the tenth in box-office records

³ Bing Crosby (1903 – 1977) was an American actor and singer whose trademark bass-baritone voice made him one of the best-selling recording artists of the twentieth century; whilst Jane Wyman (1917–2007), the first wife of the former US President Ronald Reagan, was a singer, dancer and actress.

⁴ Compared to the former Empire Theatre, the floor area of the newly-renovated theatre was smaller than before because its ground floor was converted into arcade shops and offices with a small part remaining as a theatre lobby that was connected with the shopping mall in the adjacent block. The auditorium is set back from the site boundary, the intervening space being taken up by shops, the main foyer, ticket booths and staircases.

⁵ The ticket rate of a first run English film at the Empire Theatre in 1956 was: Lodge Seats (箱座) for \$3.5, Dress Circle (超等) for \$3.0, Dress Circle Back for \$2.4, Stadium Seats (廳座) for \$1.7, Back Stall (後座) for \$1.2 and Front Stalls (前座) for \$0.7; that of the State Theatre in 1968 ranged from \$1.5 to \$3.5..

In 1956, the daily wages of a skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workman were approximately \$7.00 – \$12.00, \$5.00 – \$8.00 and \$3.00 – \$6.00 respectively. In 1968, the daily wages of a skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workman were approximately \$11.00 – \$33.00, \$6.40 – \$24.00 and \$5.60 – \$14.50 respectively. Some highly skilled workers in engineering and other trades approximately received from \$15.00 to \$18.00 a day.

among other theatres showing first run English language films on Hong Kong Island and in Kowloon, or the fifth coming after the top four on Hong Kong Island, namely Hoover Theatre (豪華戲院), Lee Theatre (利舞臺), Queen's Theatre (皇后戲院) and King's Theatre (娛樂戲院). From the 1970s until its final closure on 28 February 1997, movies produced in Mandarin and Cantonese sound-tracks were the main features of the State Theatre.

Apart from showing films, the Empire / State Theatre was also a venue for a variety of performance. Due to the lack of other international quality concert halls in Hong Kong until the opening of the City Hall in 1962, the Empire / State Theatre was an important venue for recitals. The ticket price for a recital in 1953, for instance, ranged from around \$5 to \$20, equivalent to almost the daily salary to weekly salary of an unskilled worker of the 1950s. Famous visiting artists of the Empire Theatre and later the State Theatre included: British tenor Peter Pears (accompanied by Benjamin Britten, piano), Katherine Dunham's Broadway dance company and the Taiwanese pop singer Teresa Teng. It was also a venue for charity fundraising films and performances, occasionally with the then Governor of Hong Kong, for example, Sir Alexander Grantham (1947-57) and Sir Robert Brown Black (1958-64), being the guests.

In fact, Cantonese opera was also performed in the Empire Theatre and later the State Theatre. However, with its focus on Western performances, neither the Empire Theatre nor the State Theatre was expected to be a popular venue for the performance of Cantonese opera, even though Cantonese opera was a popular folk art in Hong Kong.⁶

The joint architects of the Empire Theatre were George W. Grey, FRIBA, FRICS and S.F. Lew (劉新科).⁷ Architecturally, the most

*Architectural
Merit*

⁶ The Lee Theatre (利舞臺), Hong Kong Grand Theatre (香港大舞台) and Ko Sing Theatre (高陞戲院) on Hong Kong Island and Po Hing Theatre (普慶戲院) in Kowloon were the major theatres for the performance of Cantonese opera in Hong Kong before City Hall (大會堂) was opened in 1962. City Hall also became one of the important venues for Cantonese opera in 1963.

⁷ George W. Grey, Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects (FRIBA) and the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (FRICS), was President of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (Hong Kong and China Branch) in 1950. He was also a member of the Institute of Structural Engineers. Since 1926, Grey was in charge of the Architectural Department of the Hongkong Realty and Trust Co. Ltd. This firm designed the Exchange Building in Des Voeux Road Central in 1924 (now demolished and become the site of The Landmark) and the Peninsula Hotel in Tsim Sha Tsui in 1928. It also constructed

remarkable features are the reinforced concrete arch beam roof structure and its vertical hangars,⁸ which suspend a reinforced concrete paneled roof over the auditorium; an unusual treatment is that the arch beam structure above the roof is left exposed to the weather.⁹ The convex-shaped concrete roof is specially designed to improve the acoustics of the hall, while the arch beam system will enable the large span of the auditorium to remain clear of any obstructive interior pillars. Also the construction was intended to isolate the auditorium and projection room from outside traffic noise and vibrations. The provision of covered car parking facilities for customers was also a “first” in Hong Kong (but these car spaces were later converted to shops in the major alteration work in 1959).

The exterior of the building is in the Modernist style, of reinforced concrete frame structure and about seven-storey high, with long span curved beams suspending the roof to the auditorium. Flat roofs to the minor rooms around the perimeter. The dominant feature of the front elevation from street level, is the curved corner frontage, with a large decorative panel in high relief (浮雕), and projecting concrete frames, which resembles the form of a proscenium arch surrounding a cinema screen.¹⁰ This design of the facade can maximise the impact of such a visually important corner site.

The main facade was symmetrical with wings on both sides of the central panel, the whole section being curved to follow the wide-angled street frontage.

bungalows at Repulse Bay. S.F. Lew had pursued architectural studies in Britain and the United States.

⁸ Some may like to describe this curved roof structure as “parabolic roof trusses”. For instance, an article entitled “The New Empire Theatre,” in Henry Graye (ed.) *The Hongkong and Far East Builder*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (July-September 1951) reads, “There are two points of particular interest about this Empire Theatre:- 1) that it will be the first cinema which will provide underground parking facilities for its patrons; and 2) type of construction, the use of parabolic roof trusses to carry the reinforced concrete roof slabs over the auditorium.”

⁹ “The use of parabola-like arches to hold up a roof by hangers in a formally free way was early proposed by Le Corbusier in his competition entry for the Soviet Palace (Moscow, Russia 1930, not executed)”. Report on Preservation of the State Theatre in Hong Kong and its possible nomination on a Heritage List, Prof. Jos Tomlow. (Docomomo Specialist Committee) 10 March 2016.

¹⁰ The high relief above the front entrance of the State Theatre depicts the ancient Chinese story of “The imperial warlord Dong Zhuo and the legendary beauty Diao Chan” (蟬迷董卓). It was designed by Mui Yu-tin (梅與天), a prominent local artist and a master of the Lingnan School of Painting (嶺南畫派) who was reputed for his success in combining Chinese painting with Western techniques, to develop a unique personal style.

Unfortunately, the right-hand wing of the façade containing three rows of three square windows, was covered up after the alterations in 1959 (perhaps as a rain-proofing measure), and this has affected the symmetry of the façade. These small square windows with projecting concrete frames are very typical of the 1950s Modernist architecture. The existing condition of the building external is rather dilapidated although the roof structure and remainder of structural elements appear in good condition.

The main internal space is the auditorium on the first floor which is approximately 20 metres high from the stage level to the ceiling, and it incorporates the main stalls seating area and a dress circle above. The original inclined floors for the seating have been boarded over to make level for the snooker tables, which occupies the whole length of the main auditorium to serve the new use as a snooker centre. However, the old dress circle is no longer in use.

On second floor, there still exists the former Empire Billiard Saloon which was in operation prior to 1958, and is now known as the VIP snooker room which is still in use. There are four main staircases serving the building, together with a passenger lift. The original plasterwork is still in place at various locations, which features a simple shallow stepped cornice decoration, typical of Art Deco design. Nonetheless, there are also many cover-ups by new furnishings and false ceilings.

The building is now the oldest international-class theatre existing in Hong Kong, as well as being the third oldest of all Hong Kong's theatre buildings (please see [Annex](#)). International cinema halls of this scale in a standalone theatre building are now rare in Hong Kong, due to the economic requirements for specialist "mini-theatres" located within mega malls. Within the last 20 years, there were similar size theatres still operating, for example, King's Theatre (娛樂戲院), Queen's Theatre (皇后戲院), Central Theatre (中央戲院), Roxy Theatre (樂聲戲院) and Lee Theatre (利舞臺), but now have been redeveloped.

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

Architecturally, there is no other cinema in Hong Kong that has adopted a reinforced concrete external arch-beam system. Basically, this design of roof structure supports the roof from above by means of hangers, allowing for a pillar-less auditorium. Some believe that it is the only one of its kind known

to exist in South-East Asia and possibly the whole world.¹¹ Apart from the alterations to the right-hand side of the building in 1959, the external appearance and structure of the building has been largely unchanged.

Regarding the interior, with its conversion into a snooker centre, none of the furnishing or fittings related to cinema screening (including cinema seats, lights, stage, screen and camera equipment, etc.) could now be found. The interior has also received many improvements or alternations required to keep up-to-date with safety requirements. However, such works have not permanently compromised the structural elements of the building and the internal spaces of the State Theatre (including the auditorium, dress circle, lobbies, etc.) remain intact.

The Empire Theatre and later the State Theatre were one of the major Hong Kong venues for concerts and live entertainment, particularly significant in the 1950s, before the present City Hall came into operation in 1962. The other alternative venues for similar entertainment at that time were Po Hing Theatre (普慶戲院) in Yaumatei, Tai Ping Theatre (太平戲院) in Sai Ying Pun and Lee Theatre (利舞臺) in Causeway Bay, but all of which have now been demolished.

***Social Value
& Local
Interest***

In North Point, apart from the State Theatre, there were five other popular theatres, namely Metrople Theatre (都城戲院) (1954-63), Odeon Theatre (國賓戲院) (1963-1981), Olympia Theatre (國都戲院) (1965-1995), Sunbeam Theatre (新光戲院) (1972-) and Golden Hung Kai Theatre (金鴻基戲院) (1986-1995). Among them, the State Theatre is the only surviving standalone theatre building. It has been a local landmark along the busy tramway for around six decades and was featured both in a film in 1978, *Game of Death* (Bruce Lee's final film) and a film in 1998 *The Longest Summer* (去年煙花特別多), directed by Fruit Chan (陳果).

The opening of the building in 1952 signified the development of the city moving further eastward to North Point. It also reflected the public's changing taste in cinema films and the emergence of Hong Kong's dynamic film-making industry, starting with mainly Hollywood productions in 1952, and moving on to local Hong Kong productions through the 1970s until 1997, when

¹¹ Letter dated 23 March 2016 from the International Committee for Documentation and Conservation of Buildings of the Modern Movement.

its final film shown before closure was a Golden Harvest production, “Mr Nice Guy” (一個好人), starring Jackie Chan (成龍).

About 25 shops on G/F of the theatre building were converted from the covered car parking facilities of the theatre in 1959. Many of them had changed hands or even closed down over the years. A shoe shop, a tailor shop and an eyewear shop are the oldest shops still operating now: with the former two starting from the early 1960s and the latest from the late 1960s.

The State Theatre is within walking distance from the former Clubhouse of Royal Hong Kong Yacht Club (前香港皇家遊艇會會所) (Grade 2), the Hong Kong Red Swastika Society Building (香港紅卍字會大樓) (Grade 2) and the Tin Hau Temple in Causeway Bay (銅鑼灣天后廟) (Declared Monument).

Group Value

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Checklist of Existing Cinema Halls

(This only includes self-contained cinema/theatre buildings, and not modern-style cinemas that are incorporated within larger building blocks and shopping malls)

No.	Cinema Hall	Address	Year of Completion
1	Yau Ma Tei Theatre (Grade 2) 油麻地戲院 (二級歷史建築物)	Waterloo Road, Yaumatei, Kowloon 九龍油麻地窩打老道	1930
2	Cheung Chau Theatre (Grade 3) 長洲戲院 (三級歷史建築物)	San Hing Back Street, Cheung Chau 長洲新興後街	1931
3	State Theatre (named the Empire Theatre) 皇都戲院 (前稱璇宮戲院)	Junction of King's Road and Tin Chong Street, North Point, H.K. 香港北角英皇道與電廠街交界	1952
4	Fanling Theatre (previously called Luen Wo Theatre) (Grade 3) 粉嶺戲院 (前稱聯和戲院) (三級歷史建築物))	1 Luen Fat Street, Fanling, N.T. 新界粉嶺聯發號 1 街	1953
5	Sai Kung Theatre 西貢戲院	Ye Chun Street, Sai Kung, N.T. 新界西貢宜春街	1958
6*	Yuen Long Theatre 元朗戲院	8-12 Yuen Long Pau Cheung Square / 2-16 Fook Tak Street, N.T. 新界元朗炮仗坊 8-12 號 / 福德街 2-16 號	1961
7	Lung Wah Theatre 龍華戲院	79 Yeung Uk Road, Tsuen Wan, N.T. 新界荃灣楊屋道 79 號	1962
8	Isis Theatre 新都戲院	11 Moreton Terrace, Causeway Bay, H.K. 香港銅鑼灣摩頓台 11 號	1966
9	Imperial Cinema 京都戲院	29 Burrows Street, Wan Chai, H.K. 香港灣仔巴路士街 29 號	1969
10	Kwun Tong Theatre 觀塘戲院	9 Tung Ming Street, Kwun Tong, Kowloon 九龍觀塘通明街 9 號	1970
11	Manning Theatre 萬年戲院	68-72 Yuk Wah Street, Tsz Wan Shan, Kowloon 九龍慈雲山毓華街 68-72 號	1973
12	Scala Theatre 帝后戲院	49 Shek Pai Wan Road, Aberdeen, H.K. 香港香港仔石排灣道 49 號	1974
13	Nam Cheong Theatre 南昌戲院	223-239 Nam Cheong Street, Shek Kip, Kowloon 九龍石硤尾南昌街 223-239 號	1974

No.	Cinema Hall	Address	Year of Completion
14	Prince Theatre 華聲戲院	181 Castle Peak Road, Sham Shui Po, Kowloon 九龍深水埗青山道 181 號	1975
15	Princess Theatre 樂聲戲院	162 Un Chau Street, Sham Shui Po, Kowloon. 九龍深水埗元州街 162 號	1975
16	Ace Theatre 帝國戲院	177-181 Ngau Tau Kok Road, Kowloon 九龍牛頭角道 177-181 號	1975
17	Peng Chau Theatre (Nil Grade) 坪洲戲院 (不予評級)	Wai Tsai Street, Peng Chau, N.T. 新界坪洲圍仔街	1978
18	Fortune Cinema 華富閣戲院	4 Wah Lok Path, Pok Fu Lam, H.K. 香港薄扶林華樂徑 4 號	1978
19	Golden Valley Theatre 金茂坪戲院	40 Hiu Kwong Street, Sau Mau Ping, Kowloon 九龍秀茂坪曉光街 40 號	1978
20	Cineplex Theatre 新樂戲院	131-133 Fuk Wing Street, Sham Shui Po, Kowloon 九龍深水埗福榮街 131-133 號	1980
21	Wing Wah Theatre 前榮華戲院	333 Chai Wan Road, Chai Wan, H.K. 香港柴灣柴灣道 333 號	1982
22	Golden Flower Theatre 金花戲院	50-56 Wo Yi Hop Road, Kwai Chung, N.T. 新界葵涌和宜合道 50-56 號	1982
23	Luen Wah Theatre 聯華戲院	11-15 Fung Kwan Street, Yuen Long, N.T. 新界元朗鳳群街 11-15 號	1983
24	Merryland Theatre 美都戲院	22 Fung Kam Street, Yuen Long, N.T. 新界元朗鳳琴街 22 號	1983
25	Acme Theatre 雅都戲院	7 Lek Yuen Street, Sha Tin, N.T. 新界沙田瀝源街 7 號	1984
26	Golden Dragon Theatre 金龍戲院	2 Shui Che Kwun Street, Yuen Long, N.T. 新界元朗水車館街 2 號	1984
27	Triumph Theatre 凱旋戲院	No. 139 Sai Lau Kok Road, Tsuen Wan, N.T. 新界荃灣西樓角路 139 號	1985
28*	Dynasty Theatre 豪華戲院	No. 4 Mong Kok Road, Kowloon 九龍旺角道 4 號	1991

* still in operation

Historic Building Appraisal
No. 27 Lugard Road
The Peak, H.K.

N18

Many roads in Hong Kong recall former governors, colonial secretaries and commanding generals and this road on the Peak, constructed in the early 20th century and named after Sir Frederick Lugard (governor from 1907-1912) is an example. The Peak (Victoria Peak) towers over Central district on Hong Kong Island, attracting locals and visitors with cool breezes and stunning views over the harbour. Many aspired to live here, deterred only by lofty prices and the blanket of fog. With the construction of the Peak Tram in 1888, more people moved there to live. *Historical Interest*

The house in No. 27 Lugard Road was initially associated with a family of architects from England, surnamed Bird, who started living in Hong Kong from 1904. Constructed in **1914** when the first section of Lugard Road was completed¹, No. 27 Lugard Road was first owned by Herbert William Bird (born in 1872), who bought the land at a price of \$2,160 on 27 July 1914 in public auction. H. W. Bird was a partner of the architectural practice, Palmer & Bird – now Palmer & Turner (still a prominent architectural firm to this day). H.W. Bird was also a public figure. He was a director and the chairman of the Shek O Country Club (石澳鄉村俱樂部), the president of the Royal Society of St. George (聖喬治皇家學會), and vice-presidents of the Hong Kong Club (香港會所) and the Hong Kong Philharmonic Society in the 1920s. He was also a non-official Justice of the Peace from 1904 to 1926, a juror on the List of Jurors from 1905 to 1924 and an Unofficial Member of the Legislative Council from 1921 to 1927.

No. 27 Lugard Road was designed by H.W Bird's younger brother, Lennox Godfrey Bird (1878-1956) who was a partner of Palmer & Turner. Being a director of the Shek O Development Co. Ltd. (石澳道業主委員會), L.G. Bird was the architect of many bungalows in Shek O. L.G. Bird also served the community. From 1911 until the outbreak of the First World War, he was in command of the Reserve Company of the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps (香港義勇防衛軍) and was on active service between 1914 and 1918 and later awarded the "Distinguished Service Order" (D.S.O). In addition, he was a juror on the List of Jurors (1905 – 1914, 1916, 1920 – 1924 and 1935), the Commandant of the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps from

¹ "Report of the Director of the Public Works for the Year 1914", *Administrative Report for the Year 1914*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong Government, 1915.

1920 to 1933, a non-official Justice of the Peace (1912 – 1916, 1925 – 1928 and 1932 – 1937), and the presidents of the Royal Society of St. George and the Hong Kong Hockey Club (香港曲棍球會) in the 1920s. In 1929, L.G. Bird was awarded the “Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire” (O.B.E.), rewarding him for his contribution to society. He was the first owner of No. 28 Lugard Road built in 1924 (Grade 3).

This two-storey dwelling was bought by the Taikoo Dockyard and Engineering Company of Hong Kong Limited 太古船塢 (a branch of the Swire Group) in 1930 and since then became a residence of the company’s staff and their family. A former occupant of the house, Mrs Jean Mackie (nee Finnie) whose father was employed by the Company, was actually born in the house because, after her mother fell down the enormous staircase when heavily overdue with her, the sedan chair bearers could not get to the house in time to take her mother to the Matilda Hospital (明德醫院) at Mount Kellett which was opened in 1907 and is still one of Hong Kong’s most popular private hospitals.

The house has a fascinating history encompassing lost silver, typhoons and a bomb blast. It was once damaged by a typhoon in November 1939, when the roof cracked very badly in the storm. When the Japanese invaded Hong Kong just before Christmas 1941, the old tennis court of No. 27 Lugard Road was hit by a bomb. This tennis court, which is now the site of a swimming pool, was where Miss Finnie’s mother had buried some of the family silver. While still a toddler, Miss Finnie (later Mrs Jean Mackie) was evacuated to Canada with her mother to avoid the war. After the war, the new owner Butterfield & Swire (太古洋行) turned the house into a mess for their bachelor staff.

The house is built to an asymmetrical plan on a north-south axis; it is two storeys high with a raised terrace on two sides. Servants’ quarters and utility rooms are contained in an annex at the north-west corner of the house which gives an irregular L-shaped footprint on the site.

*Architectural
Merit*

The site is served by a long uphill driveway off Lugard Road. The elegant ironwork entrance gates are flanked by low granite rubble walls and Classical ornamental pillars. The cut slope to the Lugard Road side of the driveway (Reg. No. 11 SW-A/CR702) features exposed rock, flourishing vegetation and mature trees. The other side of the driveway is flanked by a massive masonry retaining wall (Reg. No. 11SW-A/R1054) built of squared granite buttresses with planters in between. The upper part of the retaining

wall features an ornamental arch and simple concrete balustrading. At the top of the driveway, another pair of gates gives access to the small garden and a swimming pool. The north side of the site has a rubble retaining wall and the west side has a cut rock face finished with chunam. The hillside above the site is covered with thick afforestation on west side of the site.

The architectural style of the house is an elegant neo-classical style incorporating some Freestyle elements; the external of the house features painted rough cast rendered walls raised off rubble plinths and tall transomed casement windows. The front (east) elevation is dominated by elegant projecting verandahs in Italianate style, featuring segmental arches with a deep spandrel above, supported on slender Tuscan-style single or paired columns, and ornamental balustrading at first floor level. The south-side elevation features a wide bow window at ground floor level with a flat balcony roof above. Decorative stacco features include some Baroque elements, neo-classical mouldings and Tuscan-style capitals, a moulded string course at the first level, ornamental panels, and swags of vertical pendant drops. The edge of the roof has a wide eaves overhang with ornamental coupled supporting brackets.

Internally, the ground floor rooms are arranged around a central entrance hall which contains the main staircase. The Drawing Room and Breakfast Room have windows facing south to catch the morning sun. On the first floor, the two main bedrooms have sun rooms with windows facing south. The bedrooms are mostly en-suite with bathrooms and some have adjoining dressing rooms. All rooms are decorated in neo-classical style with moulded skirting, cornices, fireplace surrounds and paneled doors. The study room on the ground floor has hardwood paneling to the walls. All floors are boarded and varnished. The bathrooms and kitchens have been modernized. Glass or crystal chandeliers hang from the ceiling in the hall and over the main staircase.

In the early colonial days, the Peak was reserved for Europeans who built lavish houses on the slopes of the Peak. Most of the old houses have gone, and modern apartment blocks stand in their place today. This particular house is a rare example of a colonial hill residence built in the early 1910s.

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

The late Mr. Robert F. Luster who bought the house in 1977 attempted to restore the house to its original look. A parapet was added back to the roof and the steel window frames was replaced by teak. The banisters of the main staircase were replaced with wood taken from the old Hong Kong Club and an

old house in Kennedy Road. Three new chimneys were added and two old chimneys were still in use. The ceilings were lowered for incorporating concealed plumbing and central conditioning system. The floors and backstairs were also replaced.

The house has undergone conversions, renovations and interventions over the years to meet contemporary needs; however, it still retains much of its authentic external appearance and internal spatial quality and should be considered a piece of built heritage.

The historical past of No. 27 Lugard Road, and the fact that it is the first building after the first section of Lugard Road was built, give it a historic role and importance in the development of Hong Kong. Its association with historic figures such as Lennox Godfrey Bird and Herbert William Bird, and other owners / occupants such as Butterfield & Swire and the Finnie family also contribute to its local interest.

***Social Value
& Local
Interest***

Lugard Road, which encircles Victoria Peak and links with the Peak Tram station, is a popular walking path. A stroll around it offers breathtaking views over lush green tropical vegetation and stunning vistas of Hong Kong's famous harbour and distant islands. The graded buildings nearby include: Peak Lookout, a bungalow-style building (Grade 2), Peak Tramways Co. Ltd. at No. 1 Lugard Road (Grade 2), Victoria Gap Substation at No. 35 Lugard Road (Grade 3), No. 28 Lugard Road (Grade 3) and No. 34 Lugard Road (Grade 3). At a distance from Lugard Road, there are old Victoria Peak Radio Station (Grade 3), Chu Wan at No. 4 Mount Austin Road (Grade 3), Peak Depot at No. 102 Old Peak Road (Grade 2), Villa Blanca at No. 47 Barker Road (Grade 2), No. 8 Pollock's Path (Grade 2), No. 23 Coombe Road (Grade 1) and Former Gate Lodge (declared monument). Among them, No. 47 Barker Road (Grade 2) and No. 8 Pollock's Path (Grade 2) have been redeveloped, with only their facades retained.

Group Value

The house was proposed to be changed to a heritage hotel and was approved by the Town Planning Board in 2013 with conditions in submitting a conservation management plan and providing an information panel and free guided tours to introduce the building and the heritage trail, etc. The proposal was met with certain objections as Lugard Road is to this day too narrow for cars to pass for much of its length, and the cliff sides are too steep to build anything on. The site condition would seem to pose a challenge to any adaptation of the house to public use.

***Adaptive
Re-use***

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