



## **RASHKB/AMO VOLUNTEERS CONSERVATION NEWSLETTER**

( November 2006 )

### **1. Introduction**

Welcome to the RASHKB/AMO Volunteers Conservation Newsletter. The following explanatory notes are given by way of introduction :-

- The Conservation Newsletter is a roundup and review of the latest built heritage conservation news and current affairs in Hong Kong, including conservation news items of interest from other countries;
- The Conservation Newsletter is published bi-monthly for RASHKB Volunteers and Council Members, and is displayed on the RAS website : [www.royalasiaticsociety.org.hk](http://www.royalasiaticsociety.org.hk) for RAS Members;
- The views expressed in the Newsletter only reflect the personal views of the Editor and contributors and are not necessarily those of the Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong Branch or the Antiquities and Monuments Office;
- Contributions on built heritage conservation and related issues are welcome and should be sent to RASHKB, G.P.O. Box 3864, Central P.O., Hong Kong;
- Due to confidentiality protection legislation personal contact numbers, addresses and other personal information will not be published in the Newsletter;
- The sources from which the material incorporated or reviewed in the text of this non-profit-making newsletter has been obtained are acknowledged where appropriate; copyright and all rights reserved are duly respected and observed as far as possible.

### **2. Architecture of Historic Buildings**

In order to enhance awareness and appreciation of our built heritage, this newsletter focuses on the architecture of historic buildings in Hong Kong. At Appendices A and B there is a chronological table and overview of Western architectural styles in Hong Kong. It is hoped that this information will be of interest and a useful source of reference as well. The next newsletter will focus on Chinese and ethnic architectural styles.

### 3. Built Heritage Conservation

Recently there have been several welcome articles on built heritage conservation in the press. On 29 September *HK Magazine* ran a six page feature by **Scott Murphy** entitled “History Forgotten – Heritage Under Threat” focusing on Star Ferry, Queen’s Pier, Central Police Station, Wan Chai Market, Dragon Garden, 45 Stubbs Road, and the old Methadone Treatment Centre. The Chinese language newspaper *Apple Daily* also ran a conservation article on 3 October and the *SCMP* featured an article on the front page of the Property supplement on 4 October by **Yvonne Liu**. *China Daily* is also planning a feature article on the subject soon.

In his September 2006 publication *Construct #2*, the Hon. **Patrick Lau**, LegCo representative for the Architectural, Surveying and Planning Functional Constituency, criticized the rigid historical significance criterion set down by the Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance and called for Government to implement a supportive, flexible and open-minded heritage policy taking economic and environmental considerations into account. The lack of a built heritage conservation policy in Hong Kong remains a cause for concern. A review was conducted by the Home Affairs Bureau in 2004 but since then there has been no word from Government on the subject, and disappointingly there was no mention of built heritage conservation in the Chief Executive’s 2006 Policy Address on 11 October.

### 4. Urban Renewal

Urban renewal has been in the news a lot recently. Urban renewal aims to solve urban decay problems due to incompatible land use planning in the early days of Hong Kong’s development. Inner city problems include poor community facilities, lack of public open space, air and noise pollution, and old dilapidated buildings and back alleys that pose hygiene and safety hazards. Many old buildings, such as pre-war shophouses, lack even basic sanitation, the residents having to rely on night soil collection.

Critics of urban renewal claim that the social network, community spirit, culture, history and characteristic features of a district are destroyed in the process. Developers tend to focus on high-density, high-rise buildings to maximize land use and profits and ignore the needs of existing residents.

The ideal planning solution is sustainable development, a concept which recognizes the inter-relationship of the environment, society and economy. The economy depends on society and both depend on the environment. In Hong Kong it is said that we have an economic growth-led development philosophy. Urban renewal or regeneration through a comprehensive approach including redevelopment, rehabilitation and revitalization projects is one solution that can bring a better living and working environment to an area. Projects such as the Ship Street Beautification Scheme in Wan Chai and similar projects in Western District contribute to urban regeneration/revitalization.

### 5. The Tamar Moat

The requirement in the tender documents for developers to design a moat around the new government office complex at Tamar seems to have upset a lot of people including the *SCMP*’s **Kevin Sinclair** who wrote a particularly sarcastic piece about it in the paper on 4 October. Contrary to popular opinion, the purpose of the moat appears to be purely aesthetic for ornamental effect and not to keep people out. Moats in fact were once quite common in Hong Kong around walled villages such as Nga Tsin Wai and Kam Tin in the N.T. The name in Chinese is *wai tong* (圍塘) loosely translated as “wall pond”. Some old village moats still exist but most of them have now been filled in for use as car parking spaces or container storage areas.

British military fortifications also sometimes had a moat or dry ditch known as a fosse around them. A good example which can still be seen is around the restored Redoubt at the Museum of Coastal Defence formerly Lei Yue Mun Fort. Other fortifications which had moats or dry ditches were the Kowloon West II Battery, Whitfield Barracks (now Kowloon Park) and North Point Battery (now Fortress Hill). There were probably others which have been lost.

There is nothing inherently wrong in having a moat as an ornamental water feature at Tamar. It

could be fun. Perhaps a replica of the Empress Dowager's famous Marble Boat (石舫) from the Summer Palace imperial gardens could be built in the moat? Or maybe such fantasies are best left to Disneyland!

## 6. HMS Tamar – Historical Note

The first HMS Tamar was a 16-gun sloop of 313 tons, built at Saltash on the River Tamar from which she took her name. The association of 'Tamar' with Hong Kong began in 1901, when the fourth vessel to bear the name – an ironclad built at London in 1863 – became the Royal Navy's depot ship here. She continued in service for forty years, until sunk in the harbour by enemy action in 1941.

The original naval shore establishment was in Wellington Barracks, which had been handed over by the Army to the Navy. In 1958, the Naval Dockyard was sold to the Hong Kong Government, and the dry-dock filled in. Harcourt Road was eventually built across the site.

In 1962, HMS Tamar emerged in its new form, small and compact, situated between the harbour and Harcourt Road. Designed chiefly to operate and maintain the local squadron, it provided in addition administrative facilities, and dealt with the recruiting and drafting of locally engaged personnel (LEP). In its early days it also had base-maintenance facilities for visiting ships of the Far East Fleet.

In 1979, Victoria Barracks was transferred to the Hong Kong Government. To cover the military need for accommodation, the Public Works Department built a 28-storey revolutionary designed (prestressed concrete space frame) high-rise building at the Royal Naval Base HMS Tamar. The new Headquarters British Forces Building was officially opened by HRH The Prince of Wales on 4 March 1979. In 1997, the Headquarters Building and part of the site was handed over to the Peoples' Liberation Army who still occupy it. Recently suggestions have been made that the PLA surrender the site but it appears this is unlikely to happen in the near future.

## 7. Adaptive Reuse

AMO came under fire from the Yau Tsim Mong District Council's building committee on 5 October according to a report in the *SCMP* next day for failing to find an adaptive reuse for two historic buildings in Mong Kok and Yau Ma Tei. Lui Seng Chun building in Mong Kok, a former Chinese medicine shop, was donated by the Lui family to the government in 2003. Nothing has been done to the building since except some maintenance work. The Yau Ma Tei Theatre closed eight years ago but there are still no plans for its future use. The AMO representative, **Richie Lam Kok-sing**, at the building committee meeting told members that a consultancy report on long-term plans should be ready by December and views from the public would be sought.

## 8. More on the Blue House

Still on the subject of adaptive reuse the Wan Chai District Council are concerned about the plans proposed by the Urban Renewal Authority and the Housing Society to move the residents out of the Blue House in Wan Chai and turn the building into a Chinese tea house with Chinese medicine shops and other commercial activities. The chairwoman of Wan Chai District Council, **Ada Wong** writing in the *SCMP* on 6 October, claims that the residential nature of the building should be retained to preserve its cultural significance which will be lost for the sake of cultural tourism if the proposed plans go ahead.

## 9. Shek Kip Mei Estate

On 15 October former residents of the Shek Kip Mei Estate gathered to bid farewell to Hong Kong's first public housing estate built by the P.W.D. between 1954 and 1955 following a fire in the Shek Kip Mei squatter area in 1953 which made about 50,000 people homeless. The fire is vividly described in the book "Gwailo" by **Martin Booth** reviewed in the October 2004 edition of the Volunteers Newsletter. There are 15 seven-storey blocks on the estate which will all be demolished except for the H-shaped block known as Mei Ho House. This block will be preserved and turned into a museum and artists' village.

A recently published book "The Shek Kip Mei Myth" by **Professor Alan Smart** (HKU Press

2006) challenges the standard view that Hong Kong's mass public housing programme was a direct and humane response by the Government to the 1953 Shek Kip Mei fire. He argues that the Government's response was influenced more by the issues of security and stability of Hong Kong than the predicament of the fire victims.

#### 10. No. 2 York Road, Kowloon Tong

One of the most visually prominent buildings on the Kowloon Tong Garden Estate is the Portuguese style villa on the corner of York Road and Waterloo Road. It was built between 1927 and 1930 by the Kowloon Tong and New Territories Development Co. Ltd. for a Portuguese named **Eduardo Jose de Figueiredo**. The architectural style is Portuguese Colonial Neo-Classical being an asymmetrical composition of transomed and shuttered wooden windows, porticos, pediments, cornices and string mouldings. A servants' block in contrasting International Modernist Style was built behind the villa. A low garden wall around the property allowed the villa to be seen in all its glory.

Recently the villa, which had fallen into a state of disrepair, has been renovated, restored and embellished with additional architectural features. The low garden wall has been replaced with a high concrete wall with massive piers like buttresses between bays or recesses which are being used to display large advertising signs. It is rumoured that the villa has been acquired by film star **Jackie Chan** and this seems to be borne out by the advertising panels which are promoting his latest film. It is good that the old villa has been restored, and in spite of the new boundary wall it can still be seen by passers-by.

#### 11. No. 13 York Road, Kowloon Tong

At the other end of York Road there is an old Art Deco-Moderne Style villa at No. 13 which is also being restored. It was also built by the Kowloon Tong and New Territories Development Co. Ltd. between 1932 and 1935. The three storeys high house is a complicated composition of cubic shapes and streamlined facades with bow-fronted bays, a zigurat gable and many Art Deco decorations and features. Unfortunately the old Art Deco style entrance gates have been removed. The garden wall has also been heightened but the period design has been kept. It is not known who has bought the house or what it will be used for. No. 13 York Road (and No. 2) are not graded historical buildings, but they have been recorded by the Antiquities and Monuments Office in view of their historical and architectural significance.

#### 12. Unesco's World Heritage List

The *SCMP* reported recently (25 October) that Unesco's World Heritage Committee has called for a report on proposed development around the Tower of London which they say pose threats to its setting and heritage value. When Unesco assesses the value of a historic building or site the surroundings are taken into consideration as well. A historic building may lose its heritage value if it cannot be viewed against the skyline or in relation to other historic buildings in the vicinity because of tall modern buildings around it.

Macau historians are also worried that historic city landmarks listed by Unesco last year are coming under threat from urban development. The Guia Fortress and the Guia Lighthouse form a World Heritage site which is threatened by proposed high-rise buildings which will not only hide the historic structures but also block the view from the fortress which is built on top of Mount Guia, the highest point in Macau. The development could result in World Heritage status being removed from the fortress site.

#### 13. Historic Hotels

*International Herald Tribune* reported on 3 October that nine hotels have recently been added to the National Trust Historic Hotels of America's list of 200 properties. Inductees include the Hilton Baton Rouge Capitol Centre in Louisiana and the Hotel Valley Ho in Arizona. To qualify for the list, a hotel must be at least 50 years old and recognized as having historical significance.

In Hong Kong probably the only historic hotel left now is the Peninsula. Most of our other famous old hotels such as the Repulse Bay Hotel, the Carlton Hotel, the Hong Kong Hilton and the

Mandarin have either been demolished, rebuilt, or completely remodelled.

**14. New Books**

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The Antique Collectors' Club in the U.K. have recently issued their Mail Order Catalogue 2007. A list of selected books from the catalogue of interest to conservationists is at Appendix C.

**15. For Your Diary**

- Photographic exhibition “Historical Photos – Tram, Star Ferry & Kai Tak Airport”, open daily (except Sundays & public holidays) until 22 November, Conservancy Association Centre for Heritage Annex, 36A Western Street, Sai Ying Pun, Western District.
- Saturday afternoon lectures at HK Heritage Discovery Centre, Kowloon Park. Enquiries : tel. 2208 4407. Website : <http://www.amo.gov.hk>.

**16. Membership**

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The latest Volunteers' membership list is attached at Appendix D.

**17. Next Newsletter**

The next Newsletter should be out sometime in January. Please send your comments and contributions to RASHKB, G.P.O. Box 3864, Central Post Office, Hong Kong.

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## Appendix A

### **Chronological Table of Western Architectural Styles in Hong Kong**

#### Early Victorian (c.1841 – 1860)

- Georgian (Neo-Georgian)
- Regency
- Colonial Neo-Classical
- Tudor Revival

#### High Victorian (c.1860 – 1901)

- Gothic Revival
- Classic Revival (Palladian, Mannerist, Baroque)
- Greek Revival
- Italianate Renaissance/French Renaissance
- Colonial Eclectic

#### Late Victorian/Edwardian (c.1889 – 1914)

- Neo-Classical (“Wrenaissance”, free-style)
- Beaux Arts
- Art Nouveau
- Arts & Crafts

#### Modern Movement (c.1919 – 1938)

- Bauhaus
- Art Deco/Streamlined Moderne
- Modernist
- International Modern
- Neo-Classical (abstracted, pseudo-classical)
- Modern Eclectic

## **Overview of Western Architectural Styles in Hong Kong**

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### **Early Victorian Period (c.1841 – 1860)**

In the early days of Hong Kong the first Western buildings were designed and built by army engineers (Royal Engineers). The style of the buildings was Colonial Neo-Classical incorporating classical architectural features, wide open colonnaded verandahs, pitched roofs of Chinese tiles, and some raised off the ground on arches forming a low open semi-basement or “crawl space” underneath the ground floor for ventilation and damp-proofing purposes. There are many examples still to be seen in the older army barracks such as Stonecutters Island and Lyemun Barracks. Most of the early buildings in Central and along the waterfront were of this Colonial Neo-Classical style as can be seen in old photographs.

Neo-Georgian and Regency styles also lingered on into the early Victorian period. Neo-Georgian buildings were plain and simple uniform buildings of strict symmetry and modular proportions with limited use of classical details. The older buildings in the Central Police Station compound and the adjacent Victoria Prison are good examples of Neo-Georgian architecture with Regency features. The twin gatehouses at Government House are very good examples of Regency type architecture in Greek Revival Style.

Some early buildings in Hong Kong were built in the Tudor Revival style. There are few left now but the Bishop’s House in Lower Albert Road and the old stone prison watch towers on Stonecutters Island are good surviving examples of the style.

### **High Victorian Period (c.1860 – 1901)**

During this period in England the so-called “battle of the styles” between Gothic Revival architecture and Classic Revival architecture took place. In Hong Kong the Classic Revival style seems to have been predominant, Gothic Revival being confined mostly to churches. Classic Revival was based on the architecture of ancient Greece and Rome. Many forms evolved including Palladianism, Mannerism, Baroque, Rococo, Greek Revival, etc. Some styles were named after the countries which developed them such as Italianate Renaissance and French Renaissance. Classical architecture never really fell from fashion in Britain’s colonial territories, where it continued to serve as an expression of British ascendancy and imperial might until the very end. Such imposing buildings were physical reminders and endorsements of the power and prestige of the colonial administration.

Although some of Hong Kong’s churches are built in Neo-Classical style, most are built in Neo-Gothic style some even exhibiting faux transitional architecture merging Tudor, Gothic, and even Romanesque styles.

### **Late Victorian/Edwardian Period (c.1889 – 1914)**

The end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the development of free-style Neo-Classical styles such as “Wrenaissance” and Beaux Arts which did not strictly follow the classical rules of architecture. Classical features and orders were used but in non-conventional ways. Asymmetrical buildings of red bricks with stone dressings were a common theme. Often features from other styles were incorporated such as Dutch gables in the so-called “Queen Anne” style. Some of the older HKU buildings, the Central Magistracy and the Central Police Station HQ building are good examples of the Neo-Classical architecture of this period.

The Art Nouveau style developed in France and Belgium and was based on natural forms such as waves, trailing plants, flowing hair, etc. It never became popular as an architectural style in England or Hong Kong, but it can be found used as a decorative form in architectural elements such as stained glass windows, fireplace surrounds, staircase and balcony balustrading, ornamental ironwork, etc.

Arts and Crafts was a late 19<sup>th</sup> century English movement to revive traditional handicrafts and

building crafts in reaction to machine-made products and materials. In architecture it emphasized vernacular styles and use of local materials. In Hong Kong there are a number of examples including Island House in Tai Po, the Peak Fire Station, Shek O Country Club, the former RHKYC Clubhouse, and Kowloon Hospital.

### **The Modern Movement (c.1919 – 1938)**

Bauhaus was the name of a German design school founded in 1919. The central principles were use of modern manufacturing methods, form to follow function, and eradication of all unnecessary decorations. The first Bauhaus buildings were stark functional houses (built for the Bauhaus teachers) with cubic asymmetrical shapes, sheer white walls (generally concrete), large plain windows, open-plan living areas and no decorative details.

The Bauhaus school was closed down in 1933 by the Nazis and the Bauhaus teachers including Gropius, Breuer, Mies Van der Rohe and others such as Eric Mendelsohn emigrated to the U.K. and the U.S.A. where they developed their ideas. The style of architecture they developed became known as the International Modern style because it transcended local and national styles. The term “Bauhaus” however has become a generic term for modern architecture particularly of the 1930s. The Central Market and the Wanchai Market are often referred to as “Bauhaus” buildings, but they are actually built in a Modernist cum Art Deco style known as “Streamlined Moderne”.

Concurrent with the International Modern Style, Art Deco was influential first in France where it began and especially in the USA. Often applied to modernist buildings as decoration, but sometimes used to design whole buildings. The Shamshuipo Public Dispensary and Methadone Clinic, and the Morrison Building at the Hoh Fuk Tong Centre in Tuen Mun are good examples of Art Deco buildings.

At the same time Neo-Classical buildings of abstracted pseudo-classical design were being built. These were built along classical lines but used decorations and ornamentation sparingly and sometimes even excluded the classical order. Examples in Hong Kong are Queen Mary Hospital and KGV School.

Finally, there are some buildings which cannot be classified under any of the previous categories as they are of hybrid or mixed style. The term Colonial Eclectic is used for such buildings in the pre-modern colonial period and the term Modern Eclectic to describe such buildings in the Modern Period.

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**List of Selected Books from the Antique Collectors' Club  
Mail Order Catalogue 2007**

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For full bibliographic details of the books featured in this list and how to order visit website : [www.antiquecollectorsclub.com](http://www.antiquecollectorsclub.com)

•	<i>Portmeirion</i> , Morris, Turner, et al., 240 pp., over 650 col. and b. & w. ISBN 1 85149 522 3 £22.50
	Published to celebrate the 80 <sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening in 1926 of Portmeirion, Merioneth, Wales, a Picturesque village in Mediterranean classical and vernacular style by the architect <b>Clough Williams – Ellis</b> (1883 – 1978).
•	<i>The English House : 1000 Years of Domestic Architecture</i> , John Steel & Michael Wright, 416 pp., over 500 col. ISBN 1 85149 5231 £40.50
	A review of the changes in style in domestic architecture in England from Norman times to the present day.
•	<i>A History of English Brickwork</i> , Nathaniel Lloyd, 456 pp., 374 b. & w. photographs, 35 measured drawings. ISBN 0 907462 36 7 £31.50
	The great standard work on English bricks and brickwork written in 1925 by the distinguished architect and author <b>Nathaniel Lloyd</b> (1867 – 1933).
•	<i>Houses and Gardens : Arts and Crafts Interiors</i> , M.H. Baillie Scott, 16 col., 210 b. & w. illustrations. ISBN 1 85149 234 8 £13.50
	One of the most influential architects of the Arts and Crafts Movement, <b>M.H. Baillie Scott</b> (1865 – 1945), practised in the Isle of Man and the North of England, but received many commissions in the South of England and from abroad. This book is a classic work in which the author cogently expresses his ideas.
•	<i>Houses and Gardens by E.L. Lutyens</i> , Lawrence Weaver, 580 b. & w. illustrations. ISBN 0 902028 98 7 £31.50
	The best known British architect of the early part of the 20 <sup>th</sup> century was <b>Sir Edwin Lutyens</b> (1869 – 1944). This book, by <b>Sir Lawrence Weaver</b> (1876 – 1930) architect, critic, and sometime editor of the magazine <i>Country Life</i> , was first published in 1913 and established Lutyens's name in English domestic architecture.
•	<i>Save Britain's Heritage : Thirty Years of Campaigning 1975 – 2005</i> , Marcus Binney, 224 pp., 240 illustrations. ISBN 1 85759 440 1 £18.00
	Published to celebrate 30 years of campaigning to save Britain's heritage, written by <b>Marcus Binney</b> Chairman of SAVE and eminent author and journalist.
•	<i>Arts And Crafts Gardens</i> , Gertrude Jekyll and Lawrence Weaver, 288 pp., 132 col., 434 b. & w. illustrations. ISBN 1 870673 16 6 £22.50
	First published in 1912 as <i>Gardens for Small Country Houses</i> , this book explores the intimate relationship of garden to house at the height of the Arts and Crafts Movement's influence. <b>Gertrude Jekyll</b> (1843 – 1932) was friend and collaborator of both Lawrence Weaver and Edwin Lutyens and is one of the most famous names in garden history.
•	<i>George Chinnery 1774 – 1852, Artist of India &amp; the China Coast</i> , Patrick Connor, 320 pp., 113 col., 189 b. & w. ISBN 1 85149 160 0 £58.50
	This book represents the first thorough study of Chinnery's life and work. It also contains an illustrated catalogue of thirty-five Western artists and amateurs.