

Historic Building Appraisal
Union Church – Sanctuary & Bell Tower
No. 22A Kennedy Road, Central, Hong Kong

The Union Church (香港佑寧堂) is located at No. 22A Kennedy Road, up the hill from Central, and next to where the Peak Tram bridge intersects with Kennedy Road. It was built after World War II to replace an earlier church which had been severely damaged during the war period. The foundation stone of the earlier church dating from 1890 was re-laid, and is now found right up the entrance stairs. *Historical Interest*

The first Union Church was built on Hollywood Road in 1845 under the leadership of Rev. Dr. James Legge (1815-1897) of the London Missionary Society who arrived at Hong Kong in 1843. And then, in 1866, the Church was relocated to a new site on Staunton Street. The current Kennedy Road site was acquired in 1889, so that the Church could be moved to a place quieter than the Staunton Street site.

During the period of Japanese Occupation (1941-1945), the Church's religious service was ceased and the pastor, Rev. Kenneth Mackenzie Dow, was interned in Stanley Internment camp. In 1945, the pre-war building in Kennedy Road was considered unsafe for congregation and the Church was temporarily moved to the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps Officers Mess in Garden Road until 1949. The construction of the Sanctuary, together with the Bell Tower, was completed in 1955 to accommodate larger congregation.

The facade of the Sanctuary combines natural hewn granite with reinforced concrete which forms an excellent transition from the external stone structure to the internal minimalist elevations. It is built of granite walls with a pitched roof and a detached Bell Tower which is a granite structure having a simple pitched roof with a void at the top for placement of the bell. *Architectural Merit*

The elevation of the Sanctuary facing Kennedy Road is rather traditional in appearance but the side elevations have a modern composition of stone and concrete. The Sanctuary is built in minimalist modern style with references to the Bauhaus School. It is a hall plus balcony with high vaults spanned from the ground to the ceiling echoing those of Art Deco architecture which favours in geometric decorations. The upper walls in the side aisles consist of a series of louver windows which permit of maximum illumination, ventilation and aesthetic variation.

Internally, the Sanctuary has impressive transverse arches in Art Deco style. Beside the west door, memorial tablets to Dr. Legge and Rev. John Chalmers are found and had been salvaged from the ruins of the old Church.

Modernist architecture is not often seen in church buildings, so that the buildings which make up the Union Church compound have a rarity and built heritage value. The buildings are well maintained and as no major alterations appear to have been carried out, they retain their authenticity.

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

The Union Church has a local history going back to 1843 so that it is one of the oldest churches in Hong Kong. It has made important contributions to educational and religious development, and even contributed to the construction costs of the Peak Tram in 1888.

***Social Value
& Local
Interest***

Well-protected by stone boundary walls and self-enclosed by lawns and patios, Union Church enjoys a relatively quiet and private space. The Church is physically close to The Helena May (梅夫人婦女會) (Declared Monument), St. Paul's Co-educational College (聖保羅男女中學) (Grade 2), First Church of Christ Scientist (基督科學教會香港第一分會) (Grade 2) and St. Joseph's College (聖約瑟書院) (Declared Monument).

Group Value

REFERENCES

Document Records at The Land Registry Office, Hong Kong

Property Particulars of Inland Lot No. 1219 R.P. & Ext.

Printed Documents of the Hong Kong Government

Hong Kong Blue Book, 1868.

Books, Articles, and Other Sources

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Wong, Man Kong. "Christian missions, Chinese culture, and colonial administration: a study of the activities of James Legge and Ernest John Eitel in nineteenth century Hong Kong". The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Ph.D. Thesis, 1996.

Our Origins, Union Church. <http://www.unionchurchhk.org/new-here/our-origins/>. Access date: 10th February 2017.