

Heritage Appraisal of May Hall, The University of Hong Kong

May Hall was the third student residential hall¹ under the direct management of The University of Hong Kong (the “University”). It was opened on 1 January 1915 and named after Sir Francis Henry May, the second Chancellor of the University and the fifteenth Governor of Hong Kong (1912-1918). *Historical Interest*

Sir Frederick Lugard, the first Chancellor of the University (1911-1912) and the fourteenth Governor of Hong Kong (1907-1912), recognised that in addition to the transmission of knowledge, personal development and moral qualities of University’s students were equally important. This could be achieved by compulsory residence either in approved colleges or hostels, or in the University itself, and by careful selection of professorial staff.

However, when the University was officially opened on 11 March 1912, its own student residential halls had not yet been built. Sir Frederick Lugard then sought the help from religious organisations whose interest in supporting education and promoting good moral character was in line with the mission of the University. The Church Missionary Society was the first to respond and established St. John’s Hall on Bonham Road to provide student accommodation in time for the University’s formal opening in the same year.

In 1913, Lugard Hall, the first student residential hall under the direct management of the University, was opened. It set a model for the construction of Eliot Hall and May Hall which were constructed on higher terraces in almost identical style. With the assistance of the Department of Public Works, Eliot Hall and May Hall were planned and constructed at a cost of HK\$185,840. After the completion of May Hall, the barrack-like tiered building groups

¹ The first two student residential halls were Lugard Hall and Eliot Hall which were opened in 1913 and 1914 respectively.

of the three residential halls were formed.

Similar to Eliot Hall and Lugard Hall, May Hall was designed to house around 60 students with quarters for an English professor and a Chinese assistant in residence who were to provide close supervision to the students. Students' rooms were located on the first and second floors, while refectory, common rooms, servants' quarters and bathrooms were on the ground floor.

During the Second World War, Lugard Hall and Eliot Hall were used as a relief hospital to provide additional support to Queen Mary Hospital when the former relief hospital operated in the Main Building of the University was damaged. At that time, May Hall served as the main residence for staff and students, especially overseas students. Though many Chinese medical students were allowed to reside in May Hall after the fall of Hong Kong, they had to assist the Japanese to carry out vaccination to the local population against cholera, smallpox and typhoid.

Dr. Duncan John Sloss, the Vice-Chancellor of the University from 1937 to 1949, and the deans arranged a secret Senate meeting on 31 December 1941 and decided to grant war-time degrees to 14 medical students who had taken their final examinations at the time of the Japanese attack although their studies were interrupted by the war. On the New Year's Day of 1942, the University Congregation was held in May Hall. May Hall was re-habilitated after the Second World War and re-opened on 1 January 1948.

In June 1966, an inexhaustible torrential rain caused a large-scale landslide at the slope adjacent to Eliot Hall and May Hall, which led to an immediate evacuation of the two student residential halls for extensive repairs. The students were temporarily removed to Lugard Hall and other residential halls. Two wardens' quarters at the east end of Eliot Hall and May Hall had to be demolished. The University took this opportunity to combine Lugard Hall, Eliot Hall and May Hall into one large residential unit named Old Halls which was opened in 1969 with

three wings, i.e. Lugard Wing, Eliot Wing and May Wing. The three buildings were linked together by covered stairways to accommodate around 200 students. In the same year, the long-established compulsory residence implemented since the University's opening in 1912 was lifted and residence in hostel became voluntary. Most of the Old Halls' residents were Medical or Engineering students and those in May Hall were mainly local Chinese. Since 1969, female students had been admitted to the Old Halls and assigned on the first and second floors of the east wing of May Wing.

Eliot Wing and May Wing were reverted to their old names (i.e. Eliot Hall and May Hall) when Lugard Wing was demolished in 1992 to cope with the development policy of the University. Nowadays, most of the areas in May Hall have been converted into offices and lecture halls.

May Hall is a three-storey structure designed by local Hong Kong architects, Denison, Ram and Gibbs. The red brick facades laid in "Flemish Bond" feature a rich variety of architectural elements, including curved pediments (hoods) over the entrance doorways, rusticated columns, Doric capitals, window sills, cornices and balustrades. The elaborate design of the architectural features is widely adopted in the Edwardian period in England. Chinese-style ceramic grilles are also found on the facade to contrast with the red brick wall. The pitched and double-tiled Chinese roofs are a local adaption.

*Architectural
Merit*

Internally, some fireplaces and original decorative details to walls and ceilings, such as mouldings and cornices, are basically intact, despite alterations and renovations carried out over the years. The open verandahs to the front elevation remain in good condition, particularly the patterned floor tiles which are very typical of the period.

Although successive major internal renovations have substantially altered the internal layout, some original features such as the patterned floor tiles and ceiling mouldings, still remain. The

Authenticity

building exterior is largely intact, although the east end of the building has been demolished with addition of concrete buttresses as strengthening due to the severe landslide damage in 1966. Verandah on the ground floor has been partially enclosed to meet the current use but could be restored when required.

May Hall is one of the oldest structures on the University campus. Also, it is one of the earliest purpose-built university student residential halls built in Western style and blended with Chinese features that still survives in Hong Kong, reflecting the vision of the University. ***Rarity***

As one of the purpose-built and one of the oldest student residential halls of the University, May Hall served as an imperative venue to provide all-round student development and to nurture the renowned hall culture of the University. As one of the historic buildings with rich variety of architectural elements on the University campus, May Hall has long been the well-known landmark which attracts visitors for appreciation. ***Social Value & Local Interest***

May Hall, together with the other historic buildings situated in the University, such as the Main Building, University Hall, Hung Hing Ying Building, Tang Chi Ngong Building, Eliot Hall and Fung Ping Shan Building (the exteriors of these buildings are declared monuments), undoubtedly form a building cluster providing an academic ambience. Other historic buildings in the surrounding areas, such as King's College (declared monument), Bungalow of West Point Filters (Grade 1), Senior Staff Quarters of Elliot Pumping Station and Filters (Grade 2), also depict the historical and socio-cultural development of the territory. ***Group Value***