

Heritage Appraisal of Stanley Mosque
No. 53 Tung Tau Wan Road, Stanley, Hong Kong

Constructed between 1936 and 1937, Stanley Mosque is the second oldest mosque¹ in Hong Kong and the only one situated within a prison compound (Stanley Prison). It stands as a testament to the growth of the Muslim community in Hong Kong and demonstrates the Government's respect for religious practices and its commitment to inclusivity among its staff. The mosque continues to serve its original purpose and is one of two only pre-World War II Islamic buildings still in existence. The mosque exemplifies the multicultural integration and social cohesion among different ethnic groups in Hong Kong.

*Historical
Interest*

Hong Kong's first prison (Victoria Gaol, later renamed Victoria Prison) was established on Arbuthnot Road in Central in August 1841. It fell under the charge of Captain William Caine, who was also responsible for managing the police and the magistrates' court.² The Prisons Department (renamed the Correctional Services Department in 1982)³ was later separated from the Police Department in the 1920s and led by the Superintendent of Prisons.⁴ The prison guards stationed at

¹ The oldest mosque in Hong Kong is Jamia Mosque at No. 30 Shelly Street, Central, which was built between 1915 and 1916. It was declared a monument in 2022.

² Hong Kong Police Force, "Chapter 1: History - The First Century", https://www.police.gov.hk/ppp_en/01_about_us/ph.html, accessed on 4 May 2026.

³ Correctional Services Department, "A Chronology of CSD's Development and Penal Measures of Hong Kong", https://www.csd.gov.hk/english/about/about_history/abt_his_1950.html, accessed on 1 May 2026.

⁴ Correctional Services Department, "A Chronology of CSD's Development and Penal Measures of Hong Kong", https://www.csd.gov.hk/english/about/about_history/abt_his_early.html, accessed on 1 May 2026.

Victoria Prison were primarily Muslims and Sikhs recruited from present-day India and Pakistan.⁵ The Muslim staff there would attend prayers at Jamia Mosque on Shelley Street in Central.

To ease overcrowding at Victoria Prison caused by the rapid growth of the prison population in the mid-19th century, several new detention facilities were planned and built⁶, including one in Stanley (predating the establishment of Stanley Prison in 1937). The Muslim staff stationed at this remote facility requested Superintendent John William Franks⁷ to provide a piece of land where they could perform their daily prayers. Initially, prayers were held outdoors where the present Stanley Mosque stands. With official permission, a simple temporary bamboo structure was later built to provide protection against the weather.

In December 1932, the Government approved a site for the construction of a new prison at Stanley⁸ to alleviate overcrowding and provide hygienic and secure accommodation for prisoners.⁹ Construction of the prison commenced shortly thereafter. Soon after, the Muslim staff submitted a petition to Superintendent Franks for the construction of a permanent mosque. Permission was granted and construction works commenced in 1936.¹⁰ Stanley

⁵ Nesar Ahmed, "Heritage Plaque Installed at Stanley Masjid" in *IUHK Newsletter*, April 2026. The author is currently an advisor to the Stanley Mosque Management Committee.

⁶ David Hampton, ISO, *Hong Kong Correctional Service Museum*, Hong Kong Correctional Services Department, October 2003.

⁷ John William Franks OBE was appointed Superintendent of Prisons on 31 December 1920.

⁸ "Report of the Superintendent of Prisons for the Year of 1932" in *Administrative Reports for the Year 1932*.

⁹ David Hampton, ISO, *Hong Kong Correctional Service Museum*, Hong Kong Correctional Services Department, October 2003.

¹⁰ "Report of the Director of Public Works for the Year 1936" in *Administrative Report for the Year 1936*.

Mosque was officially opened in 1937 at the same time as Stanley Prison, which at the time could house 2,000 inmates.¹¹

Stanley Mosque was built through the collective efforts of Indian and Pakistani Muslim staff of the Prisons Department, alongside the local Indian community. The construction costs, totalling approximately HK\$30,000, were largely funded by the department with additional support from staff contributions and a generous donation from Abbas el Arculli.¹² Abbas el Arculli was a member of the Arculli family, a well-known Indian trading family in Hong Kong,¹³ who operated a ration store that provided supplies for the detention facility at Stanley and Muslim soldiers in the British Army based at Stanley Fort.

The draft plans for the mosque were drawn by Ahmed Khan, the Chief Warder at the time. While builders were employed from India, many Muslim staff working in the Prisons Department volunteered to assist with the construction during their off-duty time.¹⁴ The establishment of Stanley Mosque demonstrates both the religious devotion of its community and the integration of Chinese and foreign cultures in early Hong Kong, as well as the

¹¹ “Annual Report on the Social and Economic Progress of the People of the Colony of Hong Kong for the Year 1937” in *Administrative Reports for the Year 1937*.

¹² Abbas el Arculli (died in 1964 at the age of 73) was a locally born member of a prominent Indian trading family in Hong Kong. His father, Abdullah Fakir (also referred to as A. D. el Arculli), founded Arculli’s Brothers, a company that supplied provisions to Indian regiments in the Hong Kong garrison. Abbas el Arculli was educated at Queen’s College and had been a practising solicitor in Hong Kong since 1919. He served as President of the Indian Recreation Club of Hong Kong in the 1930s and was regarded as a representative of the Indian community in Hong Kong. In recognition of his significant contributions to public services in Hong Kong, Abbas el Arculli was awarded OBE in 1951.

¹³ Weiss, Anita M, “South Asian Muslims in Hong Kong: Creation of a ‘Local Boy’ Identity” in *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 25, no. 3, 1991, pp. 417–53. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/312613>, accessed on 11 May 2026.

¹⁴ Nesar Ahmed, “Heritage Plaque Installed at Stanley Masjid” in *IUHK Newsletter*, April 2026.

Government's respect for the religious and cultural needs of people of different nationalities and religious beliefs.

During the Japanese occupation (1941-1945), Stanley Mosque was repurposed, first as a store and later as a dormitory for Christians. After the war, it briefly served as a recreation club for the Portuguese Emergency Unit of the Prisons Department before being returned to its original function as a mosque.¹⁵

Modelled on the Badshahi Mosque in Lahore, Pakistan, Stanley Mosque follows the traditional design of Islamic architecture, but in a simplified form without a dome or minaret. That is likely due to practical and financial considerations. Built on a symmetrical plan on an east-west axis oriented toward the Holy Kaaba in Makkah, the open verandah of its front façade is elevated by continuous steps spanning its full width. The external walls are finished in ochre yellow. The concrete flat roof is edged with a crenellated parapet, while the arcaded façade features horseshoe and ogee ornamental arches and minaret-like columns to express an Islamic architectural identity.

Architectural Merit

The main entrance leads into the prayer hall. The interior decoration is modest: the floor of the prayer hall is laid with plain rectangular terrazzo panels covered by prayer mats, and the flat, beamless ceiling is adorned with plaster-carved rectangular patterns. On the *qibla* wall opposite the entrance stands the *mihrab*, a niche that indicates the direction of the Kaaba for prayer. Adjacent to the *mihrab* is the *mimbar*, which is a pulpit in the form of a staircase used by the imam for sermons.

¹⁵ HKRS125-3-413. "Mohamedan Mosque, Stanley Prison".

Stanley Mosque has retained much of its original form since its construction. Only minimal alterations and improvements have been carried out to meet operational needs and enhance user comfort without compromising its integrity. These include upgrading the electrical systems, the installation of air conditioning units, and the replacement of timber windows and doors with metal ones.¹⁶ Apart from interruptions during and immediately after World War II, the mosque has continuously served its religious function since its completion, a testament to its enduring authenticity.

Authenticity

Stanley Mosque constitutes a rare building typology in Hong Kong. As one of the only two surviving pre-World War II Islamic religious buildings in the city and uniquely situated within a prison compound, it continues to fulfill its original religious and social functions, serving the spiritual needs of the Muslim prison staff who are far from their homelands.

Rarity

In addition to providing a venue for daily prayers, the mosque serves as a place where Muslims can meet and receive mutual support from fellow believers. The early 1990s saw Stanley Mosque also welcoming members of the wider Muslim community in association with Muslim staff of the Prison to Friday prayers once they have registered.¹⁷

***Social Value
& Local
Interest***

Stanley Mosque shares group value with a number of nearby historic landmarks, including the Old Stanley Police Station, the School House of St. Stephen's College (both Declared

Group Value

¹⁶ Other improvement works carried out in the Stanley Mosque include the resurfacing of the courtyard and the rooftop of the prayer hall as well as the construction of toilet facilities for women, a pantry and a storeroom next to the prayer hall. Nesar Ahmed, "Heritage Plaque Installed at Stanley Masjid" in *IUHK Newsletter*, April 2026.

¹⁷ Application to visit Stanley Mosque should refer to the details on the Islamic Union of Hong Kong's website (<https://www.iuhk.org/index.php/others/masjid-in-hong-kong>) with the approval of the prison authorities.

Monuments), Maryknoll House (Grade 1), Chung Hom Kok Battery (Grade 2) and Ng Wah Hall, St. Stephen's Chapel and the Main Building of St Stephen's College (all Grade 3). Collectively, these buildings bear witness to the development of the local Stanley community and the hardships it endured during the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong. From a religious perspective, the mosque shares a connection with Jamia Mosque in Central (Declared Monument) and Chai Wan Mosque (Grade 3), reflecting the broader narrative of ethnic minorities and the Muslim faith in Hong Kong. In conjunction with the Former Victoria Prison Compound in Central (Declared Monument), Blocks A to F of Ma Hang Prison (all Grade 3) and similar buildings, it is also tied to the history and development of correctional services in Hong Kong.