

TVB HK Historical Site's Feature Story on Water Supplies History (9 May 2021)
(English translation of the Chinese transcript)

Mr PANG Kin-wah : Hong Kong has experienced a relatively dry spell since
(Reporter) early this year whereas Taiwan and the Mainland even have to impose water rationing. In the past, Hong Kong had encountered the problem of water shortage due to droughts, growing population and sanitation issues.

Ms LI Man-yan : Our previous episode features how the British Hong
(Reporter) Kong Government first solved the water supply problem of the Hong Kong Island. In these two episodes, we will explore the water supply history of other areas apart from the Hong Kong Island.

In the past, people living on the Hong Kong Island mainly relied on Pok Fu Lam Reservoir and Tai Tam Reservoir for supply of fresh water. What is the case for the Kowloon Peninsula?

Mr PANG Kin-wah : Before the commissioning of the first reservoir on the
(Reporter) Kowloon Peninsula, people relied solely on well water and underground water pumped out by the Yau Ma Tei Pumping Station. Part of the Yau Ma Tei Pumping Station has now been converted into the Administration Office of Yau Ma Tei Theatre.

In the 19th century, the Chadwick Report recommended that a pumping station, as well as three wells, service reservoir and clear water tank, etc., should be constructed in Yau Ma Tei. There came this classic

Red Brick Building, built in 1895 as the water pumping station in Yau Ma Tei, to supply fresh water to the villages and business operators in Kowloon.

Mr HO Kwok-biu : (At that time) the Hong Kong and Whampoa Dock
(Local historical consumed 15 000 gallons of water per day, while the
enthusiast) Hong Kong and Kowloon Wharf and Godown Company
was another major customer for water. The first
waterworks facility in Kowloon was located here.
Without it, supplying fresh water to the inhabitants
residing on the Kowloon Peninsula would be an
arduous task.

Mr WONG Hei-nok : The Yau Ma Tei Pumping Station was equipped with
(Senior Engineer/ steam-driven pumps, which were powered by coal fire
Reservoir Safety, boilers. Water from the wells could be pumped uphill
Water Supplies to a service reservoir on the King's Park Hill and then
Department) flow through a distribution network via gravitational
force to Mong Kok, Yau Ma Tei, Tsim Sha Tsui and
Hung Hom for residential use.

Ms LI Man-yan : The pumping station complex composed of three
(Reporter) buildings, each of which served different functions.
Let's learn more about the operation of the pumping
station through an original architectural drawing of over
100 years old.

Mr HO Kwok-biu : The Red Brick Building is the only building left of the
(Local historical water pumping station, which was formerly the
enthusiast) engineers' quarters and office. The building adjacent
to the Waterloo Road consisted of the engine house and
the boiler house. The building here served as the

quarters and workshop for the fitters. The 50-feet chimney located here was demolished in 1912. This architectural drawing was autographed on 25 January 1895 by Mr Francis COOPER, the Director of Public Works at that time.

Mr PANG Kin-wah : Mr HO Kwok-biu said that as the engineers and the
(Reporter) supervisors were Europeans, they were not accustomed to Hong Kong's climate so corridors were built inside to enhance ventilation. After the pumping station ceased operation in 1911, only the Red Brick Building remained and was converted for other purposes. Its special features including arched verandahs, granite coping stones and the red bricks were preserved. The Red Brick Building is the oldest existing building of a water pumping station under the Water Supplies Department, which was classified as a Grade 1 historic building in 2000.

Ms LI Man-yan : From the geographical perspective, it is not viable to
(Reporter) build a reservoir on the Kowloon Peninsula, and the pumping station could barely meet the demand for fresh water. After 1898, when the New Territories was leased to the British authorities, a reservoir was constructed in the area to the north of Boundary Street. Construction of the Kowloon Reservoir began in 1903 and was completed three years later, replacing the operation of supplying fresh water through wells and pumping station.