

TVB HK Historical Site's Feature Story on Water Supplies History

(7 June 2020)

Cantonese Dialogue

Reporter
Li Man Yan: In 1842, the Treaty of Nanjing was signed between the Qing government and Britain. Hong Kong Island was ceded to Britain. How did residents live without a well-established water supply system?

Electrical Engineer/
Planned
Maintenance
Ko Yik Yan: At that time, the residents of Hong Kong Island primarily engaged in agriculture, fishery and mining. They installed aqueducts with bamboo to divert water from the mountain streams to their homes or fields. For the European immigrants, they usually dug wells at their homes to obtain water. There were five water tanks for water supply to the City of Victoria where the residents could collect water from those water tanks at public standpipes. Also, there was direct water supply to the government headquarters, the district where the Government House and Tai Kwun are currently located. Wealthy people would hire water coolies.

Reporter
Pang Kin Wah: It was also common for residents to pay for transportation of water. In 1882, the fees for transporting 10 gallons of water from wells or streams ranged from 0.4 to 1 cents. The population had been escalated on Hong Kong Island since its cession to Britain. How did the government deal with the situation of higher population with less water?

Reporter
Li Man Yan: The government announced an award of 1,000 pounds to solicit proposals for water supply. The proposal from a Clerk of Works in the British Royal Engineering Department was finally adopted. In 1863, Pok Ful Lam Reservoir, which was the first reservoir in Hong Kong, was built in the Pok Fu Lam valley. Water supply was then available to the residents in the north-western part of the City of Victoria.

Reporter
Pang Kin Wah: But soon extensions to the reservoir were undertaken and the construction of Tai Tam Reservoir commenced.

Senior Engineer/
Reservoir Safety
Wong Hei Nok:

In 1884, the population of the City of Victoria had exceeded 110 thousand. The water supply could not meet the demand as allowable water supply to each person might only be a few gallons per day. The dam (of Tai Tam Reservoir) was completed in 1888 with a capacity of 310 million gallons. In 1897, the height of the dam was increased by 10 feet, increasing the entire reservoir capacity to 400 million gallons, which was almost five times greater than the capacity of Pok Fu Lam Reservoir.

It was a bold idea to build a waterworks tunnel of approximately 7,344 feet long to supply water to the City of Victoria. The total cost of the dam and waterworks tunnel was HK\$1.25 million at that time.

Reporter
Li Man Yan:

It seems like a movie scene here.

Reporter Pang Kin Wah:

In fact, this is the oldest pumping station of Water Supplies Department which was declared as monument in 2009. It has not been changed significantly for over 100 years and is now still commissioned.

Reporter
Li Man Yan:

Tai Tam Tuk Raw Water Pumping Station was built in 1904. At that time, the treated water was mainly supplied to the residents along the northern shore of Hong Kong Island.

Reporter
Pang Kin Wah:

In the 1920s, five reservoirs had been constructed on Hong Kong Island and Kowloon respectively which had improved the reliability of water supply. Yet, the situation did not turn out as expected.

Senior Engineer/
Reservoir Safety
Wong Hei Nok:

The total rainfall between July 1928 and July 1929 was very little which was only around 980 mm. In April 1929, Hong Kong implemented Stage VII water rationing. The residents needed to queue up for obtaining water from street. At least 77 thousand people had left Hong Kong.

Reporter
Li Man Yan:

The reservoirs were almost dried up. The British Air Force experimented artificial rain above the catchment areas of reservoirs. Also, the government imported water from other places, including Japan and Shanghai. Besides, wells and nullahs were once again opened as to relieve the water shortage problems.

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