Historic Building Appraisal
Old Dairy Farm – Other Site Structures
Pok Fu Lam, H.K.

Historical Interest

The Old Dairy Farm in Pok Fu Lam was once an extensive complex of farm buildings erected by the Dairy Farm Company. The Dairy Farm was founded in 1886 when Dr Patrick Manson (a Scottish surgeon and a pioneer in the fields of hygiene and tropical medicine) persuaded five influential businessmen in the city, including Paul Chater, to invest in a local dairy farm. While in Hong Kong, Manson also spearheaded the founding of the Hong Kong College of Medicine, which in turn evolved into Faculty of Medicine of The University of Hong Kong. He was also a distinguished parasitologist and the first to state the hypothesis that the mosquito is the host of the malarial parasite and thus an active agent in diffusing the disease. The Dairy Farm Company's declared purposes were threefold: (i) to provide a regular supply of hygienic fresh milk for Hong Kong people; (ii) to reduce the price of cow's milk so as to make it affordable by the city's growing population; and (iii) to realize a profit for the company shareholders.

The Old Dairy Farm occupied a 120-hecture hilly site in Pok Fu Lam, with an initial capital of $30,000 and a herd of 80 dairy cows imported from America (and later from Australia, Scotland and Holland).[1] In spite of the hilly nature of the land, Pok Fu Lam was selected as the site for dairy farming for a number of reasons. First of all, Pok Fu Lam was isolated from the disease-ridden slums in Sheung Wan, but was only four miles away from the central district of Hong Kong Island. It was sloping seaward on a piece of land rising to 500 feet above sea level, making the site receive cool breezes which were especially important for dairy farming during the sub-tropical summer in Hong Kong.

The cows had to be kept as cool as possible if they were to stay healthy and produce the maximum quantity of milk. Heat, together with humidity, described by a farm manager of the Old Dairy Farm as "discomfort index", could adversely affect milk yield and breeding cycle. Furthermore, the location had a reliable water supply and good drainage. The site condition was good for the cows because cows consumed a lot of water every day; water was

[1] Native buffaloes were poor milk providers. Their milk was very rich in fats and thus difficult to be digested. Ayrshires from Scotland and Holsteins (or Holstein-Friesians) from Holland, however, could produce a large yield of milk with a high percentage of butter fat. The milk from Holsteins was most easily digested and Holsteins was also a good butcher's animal.

also required, for cleaning the cowsheds and the related buildings as well as dairy utensils.

In 1899, to prevent the spread of disease from one part of the herd to another, Granville Sharp, who had served on the Board of Directors of the Dairy Farm Company since 1886, initiated the idea of dividing the herd, instead of having it all in one group. By 1899, four octagonal cowsheds were in operation, and it was proposed to erect more. Following Sharp's initiative, the construction of segregated cowsheds in Sassoon Road commenced. In addition, each cowshed had its own separate team of workers, in order to reduce the risk of carrying diseases from one shed to another, and to facilitate isolation during any outbreak of disease. The farm was mainly composed of cowsheds, paddocks, silos, manure pits, living quarters for cowboys, etc. Silos were used to store surplus fodder during the summer and supplied as silage in the winter to the herd; whereas manure pits were for collecting cow manure for use as fertilizer. Manure was kept in the pits until it was ready to spread on the surrounding grassland as fertilizer. By 1910, there were 35 cowsheds on the Pok Fu Lam farm; and by 1955, the number had risen to 47. According to a study of the farm in 1957, about 50 cowsheds at the time were separated from each other by at least 100 yards. The business of the Dairy Farm was so prosperous that in 1936 it was reported to be the fifth or the sixth in the size of the herd in the world.

The outbreak of the Pacific War in 1941 paralyzed the Dairy Farm Company along with the rest of Hong Kong. During the Japanese Occupation (1941 – 1945), the farm was taken over by the Japanese troops; only several key staff members, including the farm manager and his assistant, the company's veterinary surgeon and an engineer remained on the farm. Milk was reserved for Japanese consumption, mainly for the military hospital; also to internment camps. 1,312 out of the 1,900 animals of the farm were shipped to various parts of Mainland China, including 200 cows to Guangzhou between 29 December 1944 and 12 July 1945, for providing fresh milk to the Japanese troops. By the end of the Japanese Occupation, the herd at Pok Fu Lam had only about 300 cows; many of them were in very poor condition as a result of malnutrition. After the war, farm buildings were repaired and dairy farming at Pok Fu Lam was revived. By the 1950s, Europeans and Indians were still the main consumers of fresh milk, although the number of Chinese customers was gradually increasing, among the wealthier and middle-class families. Schools,

particularly army schools, The University of Hong Kong and hotels, all ordered for fresh milk.

In the post-war years, the government needed land for vast new housing projects in order to meet the drastic and huge increase in population. By the early 1960s, a large amount of farmland had been resumed by the government, and residential developments began. Vast new housing estates, such as Baguio Villa, Wah Fu Estate, and Chi Fu Fa Yuen, were built on the original farmlands of some 300 acres. As a result, many Dairy Farm premises were abandoned or demolished. To meet the demand for milk, the supply was supplemented with the milk delivered by Dairy Farm's tankers from Kwong Ming Farm in Shenzhen every day. In 1981, a new business policy was established: core businesses were defined as retailing, wholesaling, food and ice manufacturing, and catering. It was for the first time in the company's history that dairy farming was excluded from mainstream business. In 1983, the Dairy Farm Company sold off the herd and more farmland was redeveloped for residential use.[2] The Old Dairy Farm buildings which still exist include a Senior Staff Quarters (Grade 1), the Main Office Building (Grade 2), a Cowshed (Grade 2) and other structures such as silos, manure pits, piggeries and paddocks.

Today, the existing structures of the Old Dairy Farm, which include structures, buildings, together with those graded historic buildings, are located near the Bethanie, Vocational Training Council (VTC), Pok Fu Lam Village, Baguio Villa, Chi Fu Fa Yuen, Wah Fu Estate, Queen Mary Hospital and Ebenezer School & Home for the Visually Impaired (心光盲人院暨學校).

Architectural Merit

Many ancillary structures, e.g. entrance gate pillar, water tank, water filters, a dairy, stream crossings, masonry parapet walls etc. were required as essential provisions necessary for the safe and efficient operation of the farm.

Ancillary Structures near Pok Fu Lam Village

Water Filter (Serial No. N315)[3]

This brick-built water filter, also known as a sand trap, was probably constructed between 1931 and 1941. It was used for removing sand and mud

[2] The old farm lots roughly cover the present land bounded by Bisney Road and Sassoon Road as well as its adjoining piece of land bounded by Sassoon Road and Victoria Road, both below Queen Mary Hospital (Lot D.F.L No. 1); Baguio Villa and the land near Ebenezer School (Lot D.F.L. No. 2); the slope near the Vocational Training Council Pokfulam Complex and the land where Wah Fu Estate, Chi Fu Fa Yuen, Pokfulam Gardens and Bel-Air on the Peak (Lot D.F.L. No. 3) are now located, and the slopes near Pok Fu Lam Village (Lot D.F.L. No. 4).

[3] Some villagers of Pok Fu Lam Village recalled that the structure was a manure pit.

from collected rainwater before it was channeled down the hill into the animals' water troughs. The water filter, covered by a curved reinforced concrete roof, consists of a rainwater inlet hole, a brick chamber (with its interior rendered in cement, which holds the filter material, usually fine sand) and an outlet channel of smoothed cement to distribute the filtered water. There is also a small attached building constructed of volcanic rock (laid "random rubble" style), probably used to store materials and tools for the filter operations.

Pond (Serial No. N316)

Probably built between 1958 and 1968, it was an open water tank. Two flights of concrete steps leading down to the bottom for clearing debris and collecting water still exist.

Water Tank (Serial No. N317)

Built before 1941, the water tank had heavy buttresses of coursed granite blocks to support its granite walls. Overspill rainwater channel of concrete, which leads down the slope, still exists.

Masonry Parapet Wall (Serial No. N318)

It is believed that the parapet wall was built before 1958. It was constructed of blocks of volcanic rock laid in "random rubble" style, with a rounded cement top, and built along a path linking up cowsheds. Water diversion facilities below the path to divert overflow can be identified.

Cowboys' Quarters near Chi Fu Fa Yuen

Cowboys' Quarters (Serial No. N319)

Cowboys' quarters were usually located close to cowsheds to facilitate easy access at all times of day and night, and were often on the storey above the cook-house and store.

Unfortunately, there are no longer any complete cowboys' quarters of the Old Dairy Farm still surviving. Only the remains of the lower section of the structure of a cowboys' quarters which was built before 1931 have been identified near Chi Fu Fa Yuen so far. All that remains are ground floor slabs and lower sections of the wall.

Ancillary Structures near Chi Fu Fa Yuen

Dairy (Serial No. N320)

Probably built between 1931 and 1941, it has very little surviving, except for an external retaining wall which also formed a wall of the dairy, the base, cement floor with white mosaic tiling and concrete steps leading up to the entrance. Its base was constructed of volcanic rock laid in "coursed rubble" style.

Ancillary Structures near VTC

Entrance Gate Pillar (Serial No. N321)

The remaining single entrance gate pillar was probably erected in an early stage of the Farm development, say around the 1890s. It was constructed of granite and displays basic Doric decoration and is now the only remaining pier which formed the entrance way to the Old Dairy Farm main buildings. A hinge at the upper section provides evidence of the gate.

Retaining Wall and Water Tank (Serial No. N322)

Probably constructed between 1958 and 1968, the retaining wall is a good example of heavy engineering using the local volcanic rock cut and laid in "coursed rubble" style, and it is approximately 6m high. Part of the retaining wall, at the top, was formed into a small brick water tank, with its interior rendered in cement. An old piping for the distribution of water is still visible at a corner of the water tank.

Water Filter (Serial No. N323)

Probably built between 1945 and 1958, the water filter was constructed of red brick and located at the foot of a slope. The outlet and inlet ends of filter, the brick division to separate the deposited mud / sand from the clear water, the chamber and outlet hole for clear water, as well as the chamber for incoming muddy water to collect the mud and sand still exist.

Latrine (Serial No. N324)

Probably built between 1945 and 1958, it was constructed of rendered red brickwork with a flat reinforced concrete roof. A cement fascia adds a little decoration to this otherwise plain structure. There are a window in the end wall and ventilation openings in the long side of red brick wall.

Incinerator (Serial No. N325)

Probably built between 1945 and 1958, it was constructed in brickwork and

rendered externally with cement. There are steps up to the loading opening at top of the structure. Openings at ground level for clearing out the burnt ash remain.

Pond (Serial No. N326)

The exact year of construction of the pond, located in between two manure pits (N296 and N297), is not known. It was probably built between 1945 and 1968. It was recalled by some villagers of Pok Fu Lam Village that it was a pond (or an open water tank) (水池). There are two big stones at the bottom of the pond, with a flight of steps leading down to the bottom for clearing debris and collecting water, although the steps are in a derelict state.

Masonry Parapet Walls & Ramp (Serial No. N327)

Constructed of volcanic rock laid in "random rubble" style, the parapet walls are remains of the paddock of the cowshed built in 1887 (Grade 2), whereas the walls laid in "coursed rubble" on both sides of a ramp formed a passageway leading from the 1887 cowshed to poultry houses, as indicated on a map printed during the Japanese Occupation.

Ancillary Structures near Ebenezer New Hope School

Masonry Parapet Wall (Serial No. N328)

The parapet wall was built before 1941 along a path to prevent animals from falling down the hill. The path led from Pok Fu Lam Road down to a staff quarters (demolished) at the foot of a slope. The wall is constructed of volcanic rock laid in "random rubble" style, with a rounded cement top.

Rarity and Authenticity

In the mid-1950s, there were 19 dairy farms, mostly run by Chinese and one by Indian, mainly in Kowloon and two in Tsuen Wan, New Territories. They were much smaller in scale than the Dairy Farm. Among them, The Kowloon Dairy Farm (九龍維記牛奶有限公司), established on Boundary Street in 1904 and relocated to Clear Water Bay in 1930, was the only dairy farm operated on a scientific basis comparable to the Dairy Farm in Pok Fu Lam.[4] In 1972, The Kowloon Dairy Farm was relocated to Yuen Long; and in 1984 it further moved to Guangzhou.

Trappist Dairy (十字牌鮮奶) is another well-known brand of fresh milk in

[4] Most of the farms were located in Diamond Hill and two in Tsuen Wan. Each of the farms at Diamond Hill only owned one or two cowsheds and kept an average of 40 cows. The two farms in Tsuen Wan had only one and two cowsheds respectively.

Hong Kong but has a much shorter in history than the Old Dairy Farm. It was firstly a small dairy farm operating under the Trappist Monastery (神樂院) on Lantau Island in the early 1960s. It later expanded and moved to Yuen Long in the early 1980s and has then been running by Trappist Dairy Limited (神樂院牛奶有限公司).

The remains of these various old structures at the Old Dairy Farm complex provide examples of specialized stone structures, of which few similar constructions have so far been identified in Hong Kong. They, therefore, tell the development of dairy farming history in Hong Kong.

Social Value & Local Interest

Dairy Farm was an important part of Hong Kong's history. It is a tale of men who developed a company not with the sole intent of making money, but with a commitment to help establish a thriving community in this part of the world. Today, more than 130 years since 1886, "Dairy Farm" is still a well-known brand of fresh milk for Hong Kong.

The Old Dairy Farm provided jobs for villagers from nearby, like Pok Fu Lam Village.[5] Villagers worked as cowboys, watchmen and so on. These structures provide examples of the important work places for local village cowboys who were employed there in the past.

Group Value

The surviving structures of the Old Dairy Farm at Pok Fu Lam include cowsheds, paddocks, silos, manure pits, piggeries, stream crossings, staff quarters and ancillary structures, although some of them are in poor condition. The farm site provides an example of dairy farming industry in Hong Kong.

Other heritage buildings near the Old Dairy Farm include the Bethanie (Declared Monument), University Hall of The University of Hong Kong (the exterior is a Declared Monument), Jessville at No. 128 Pok Fu Lam Road (Grade 3), waterworks structures of Pok Fu Lam Reservoir (Declared Monument / Grade 2 / Grade 3) and No. 97 Pok Fu Lam Village (Grade 3).

[5] The growth of the population of the village had led to the scarcity of cultivated land by the 1950s and subsistence farming could no longer be relied on as a means of living.

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