

120 Wellington Street, Former Wing Woo Grocery Shop

A Historic Building Appraisal and Recommendations

威靈頓街 120 號，前永和號歷史建築之評估報告及建議

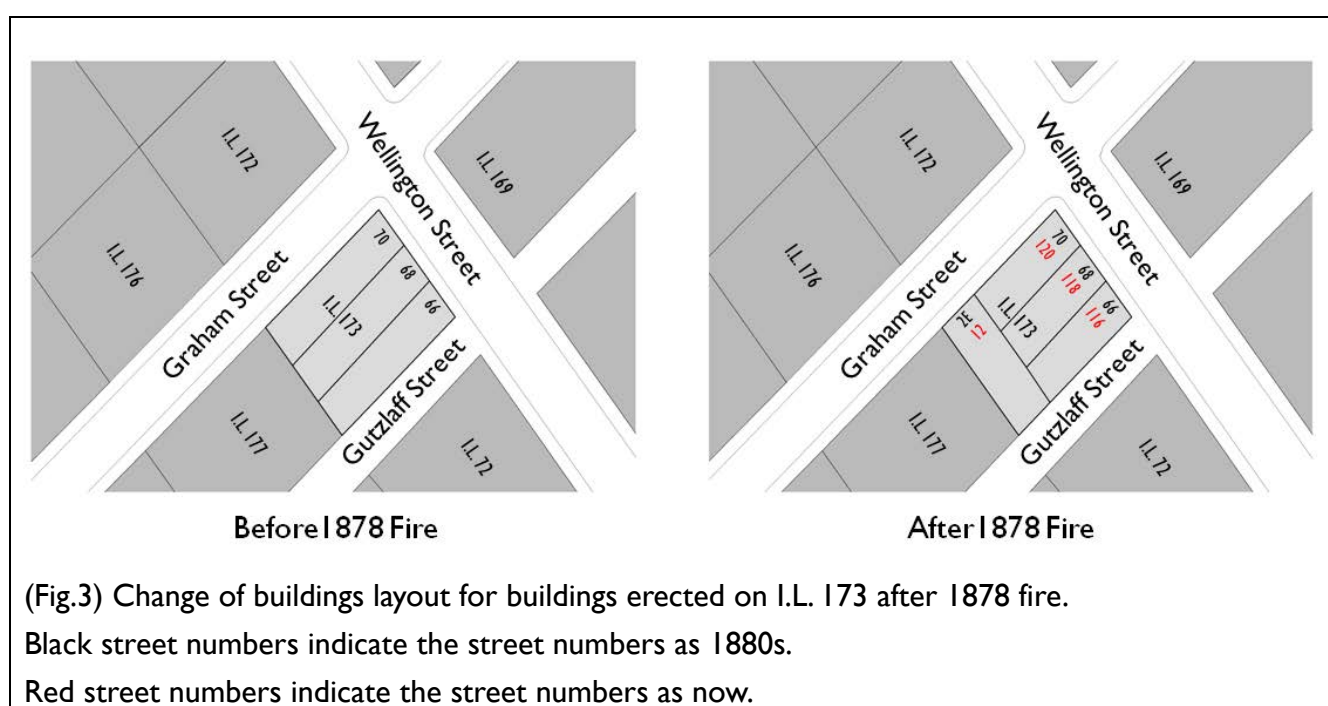
Prepared by Jack Chui, HKICON, 1st December 2016



the buildings began. Four buildings were erected on the lot, being

- 66 Wellington Street (renumbered as 116 Wellington Street later)
- 68 Wellington Street (renumbered as 118 Wellington Street later)
- 70 Wellington Street (renumbered as 120 Wellington Street later)
- 2E Graham Street (renumbered as 12 Graham Street later).^{[2][4][5][6][7]}

A significant change was that the buildings facing Wellington Street were less deep than the first generation of buildings erected on this lot, due to the introduction of an extra shop front on Graham Street.



All four buildings were purchased by a Chinese owner in 1879. Building 120 Wellington Street as it stands today was a result of the construction of 1879. Different shops were established within this building, including a gold and silver smith shop until early 1900s.

Wing Woo Grocery Shop was established by Mr Kwan Kam Ming (關錦明) and two of his partners in this building in 1930s.^[15] During the Japanese occupation in WWII, the shopowners left Hong Kong, fled back to their hometown in San Wui and the shop was closed. Due to the shortages, a rationing scheme of rice, salt and oil was introduced by the Japanese military government. The ground floor of the building, served as a salt and sugar depot during the occupation.^[14]

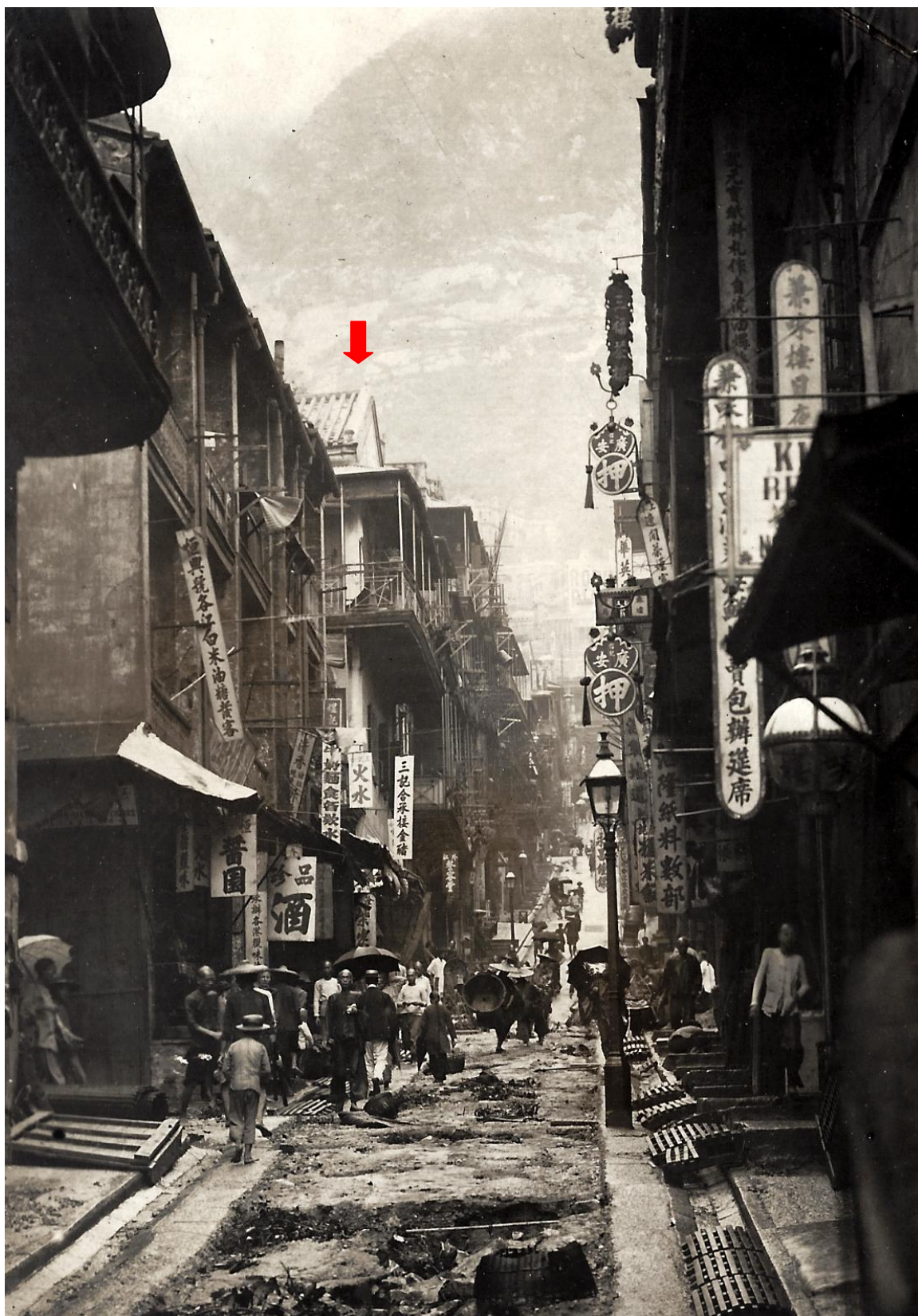
After the war, Wing Woo reopened and reached its peak during 1960s, employing 12 employees. The shop used to serve the local community majorly. However, the business declined from the 1970s

through to the turn of the century. Having run the business for almost eighty years and being one of the last traditional grocery shops in Central, it became famous and attracted foreign visitors and received interviews from the press. The building was purchased by the Urban Renewal Authority in 2008 and Wing Woo eventually closed down in early 2009. The building has been vacant since this time.



(Fig.4) Photograph dated 1894 showing the plague inspector inspecting the hygiene condition, the background being the junction of Wellington Street and Graham Street, note the Chan Nam Gold and Silver Smith signboard

(Source: [12])



(Fig.5) Photograph dated 1906, showing Graham Street after a typhoon strike, 120 Wellington Street pointed in arrow

(Source: Kindly provided by Mr Ko Tim Keung)



(Fig.6) Photograph dated 1930s, showing the overall view of Graham Street, 120 Wellington Street pointed in arrow

(Source: <http://www.hkmemory.org/>)

1.2 Description of the Existing Building

1.2.1 External Description

The existing building is a three-storey building which measures 5.1 meters in width and 12.9 meters in depth. It is constructed in load-bearing Canton green-grey brick (廣東青磚). It used to share two party walls with 12 Graham Street on the south and 118 Wellington Street on the west before the demolition of these two buildings in 2015. After the demolition of the adjacent buildings, steel bracing was added to the lone-standing building.

The building has a two-bay by four-bay façade. The north elevation has two bays. On ground floor, two granite piers and a large timber beam sitting on the rebate of the granite pier provide a large shop front opening. There are two round arches on each upper floor with altered French double doors. Remaining

rendered keystones and mouldings can be observed above the first floor arches. Two-course brickwork corbel is on the top of the masonry, supporting a double-layer Cantonese pan-and-roll tile roof (雙筒雙瓦) with an overhang at about 200mm.

The west elevation has four bays. The first bay on ground floor has a similar arrangement as the north elevation with granite piers and timber beams. Therefore, it is presumed that the original design was an open verandah on ground floor but blocked up afterwards. The second bay has a window with granite surround and metal security bars. The third bay is a doorway leading to a staircase to upper floor while the fourth bay is a window with security bars. Rendered mouldings are decorated the ground floor openings. Four flat arch openings are the on first floor as windows. Three round arch openings are on the second floor with altered French double doors. The rear bay on second floor is an original rectangular window opening with granite cill. This elevation is topped with a gable wall.

The south elevation and east elevation were two party walls with 12 Graham Street and 118 Wellington Street. After these two buildings were demolished, steel bracing was erected to support



(Fig.7) External view of the building as in 2016.

the remaining 120 Wellington Street.

Based on the historic photos and the evidence on the building (infilled openings and door thresholds), it is known that there was originally a cantilever balcony on first floor, north elevation but removed after 2009. It is also known from the historic photograph that there was originally a cantilever balcony on second floor north and west elevations with a corrugated roof cover, presumably two-bay on the north, three-bay on the west, removal date unknown. The balcony was supported by curved iron brackets with circular infills and the balustrade design was a cross pattern decorated with circular dishes.

1.2.2 Internal Description

The existing building has three floors with a mezzanine floor above ground floor. The ground floor was home the Wing Woo grocery shop. There is a timber panel separating the main shop and the storage area on the back. From the storage area there is a ladder leading to the mezzanine floor. A small door opening from back of the storage area leads to the cock house located at the rear side of the building.



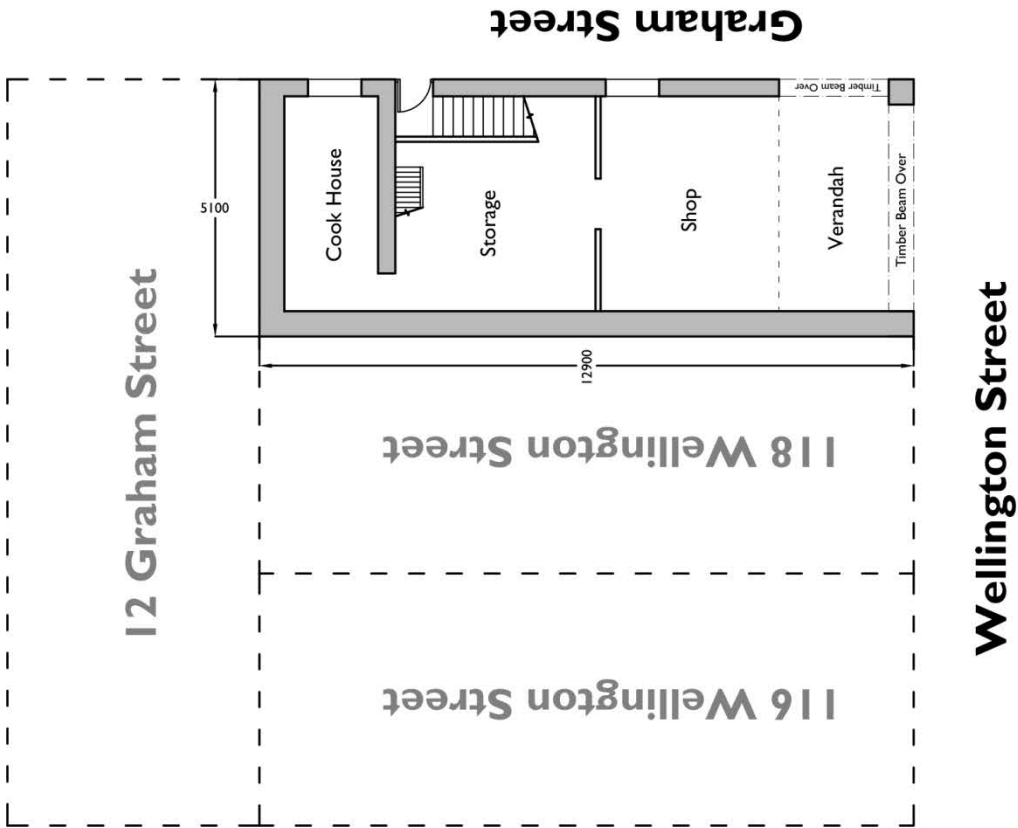
(Fig.8) Wing Woo shop as in 2008.

Source: Wikipedia, photo by WiNG

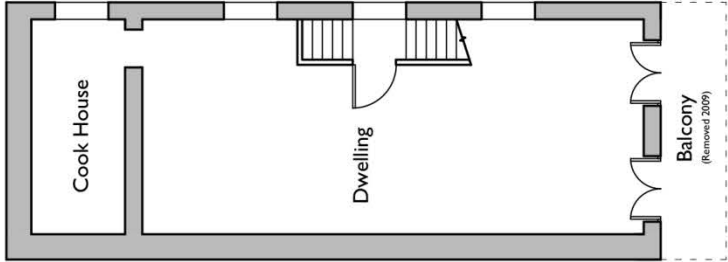
From the side of Graham Street, coming from the doorway at the third bay, there is a timber stair leading to the upper floors. The timber stair is separating the rest of the building by timber panel walls. The upper floor of the building was used as dwellings.

The building has structural timber floors. The timber floorboards are sitting on the timber joists which spans from masonry walls.

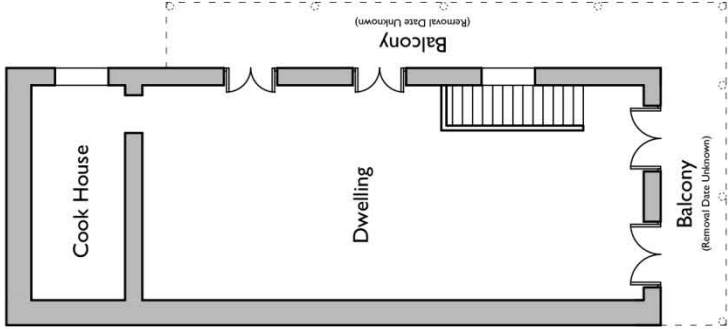
(This part to be further supplemented upon internal inspections.)



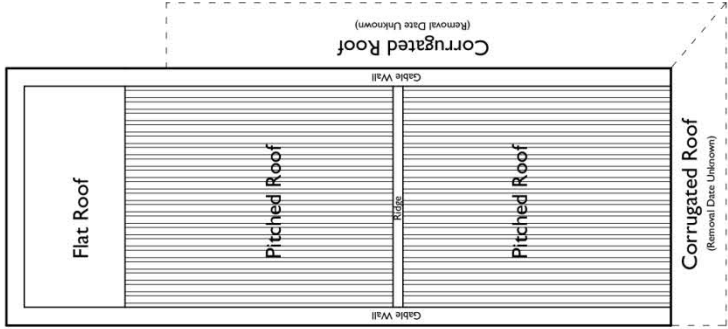
Ground Floor Plan



First Floor Plan



Second Floor Plan



Roof Plan

2 Significance

2.1 Historical Significance

The existing building on 120 Wellington Street is the original building built in 1879, immediately after the 1878 Great Fire. This is supported by a number of documentary and physical evidences.

1) There is a historic photo, taken in 1894 during the plague (see fig. 4), showing the hygiene inspector inspecting the hygiene condition on Graham Street. 120 Wellington Street is in the background with the signboard "鎮南 Chan Nam Gold and Silver Smith", which matches the record of the address on the Valuation Table at the time. The building's appearance on the photo matches what it is standing today.

2) There is a historic photo, taken in 1880 showing the general view of the Wellington Street (fig. 9). The building has similar architectural details with the buildings along the street: two-bay shop front with round arches and rendered moulding and keystones.

3) The entire building (about 50 feet height at the gable wall) is constructed in Canton green-grey bricks, however this is not allowed according to Buildings Ordinance 1889 if the building is reconstructed after 1889.

"Sound black bricks may be exclusively used in any wall of 36 feet in height or less; but when the wall is of a greater than 36 feet the special approval of the Surveyor General shall be required in respect of the use of black bricks except in the upper portion of the wall to the extent of 36 feet."

"All corbelling for the support of floor or of roof timbers, shall be in stone cut to flat bed s or in red brick at least nine inches in length and laid flat."

(Extract from Buildings Ordinance 1889^[17])

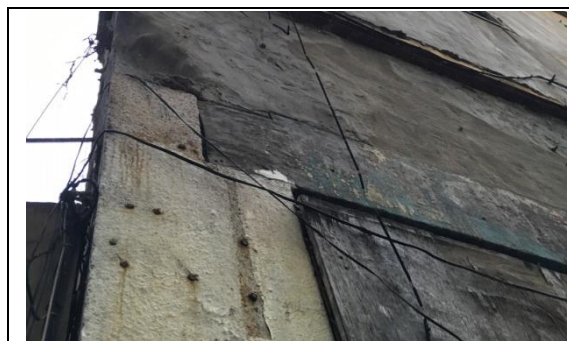


(Fig.9) Photograph taken on Wellington Street in 1880s, showing similar architectural details. (Source: Hong Kong Public Library)



(Fig.10) Some of the green-grey brick revealed due to spalling render

4) There are two timber beams on the façade supporting the masonry above. Throughout the existing shophouses in Hong Kong, the method to form a large opening would be using brickwork arch (such as 172-176 Queen's Road Central) on earlier shophouse or reinforced concrete beam (such as Lui Seng Chun and Wo Cheung Pawn) on later shophouse. However, it is unique to use granite column and timber beam to form a large shopfront.



(Fig. 11) A close-up look to the granite pier-timber beam structure

5) Before the demolition of 118 Wellington Street and 12 Graham Street, this building shares two walls with the adjacent buildings (party walls), making it a back-to-side layout. This layout was not allowed according to Public Health and Buildings Ordinance, 1903.

"Every domestic building erected on land obtained from the Crown after the date of the commencement of this Ordinance shall be provided by the owner with an open space in the rear, or partly in the rear and partly at the side, exclusively belonging to such building, equal in area to not less than one-half of the roofed over area of such building." (Extract from Public Health and Buildings Ordinance 1903^[18])

Being the oldest surviving shophouse and the only 1st generation shophouse in Hong Kong standing over 135 years, it was the reconstruction after 1878 Great Fire - a significant disaster in Central and Hong Kong. It witnessed the urban development in Graham Market, part of the Middle Bazaar, one of the earliest street market in Hong Kong. It is a rare example of shophouse that was built predates 1894 plague, which led to a series of improvements to the living standard and hygiene condition within the tenement buildings, being The Public Health and Buildings Ordinance 1903. This includes the introduction of scavenging lane, reduction of building depth, provision of latrines and the minimum floor area to habitable spaces. This makes the building important for us to understand the evolvement of local dwelling, urban development, public health development in late 19th century Hong Kong.

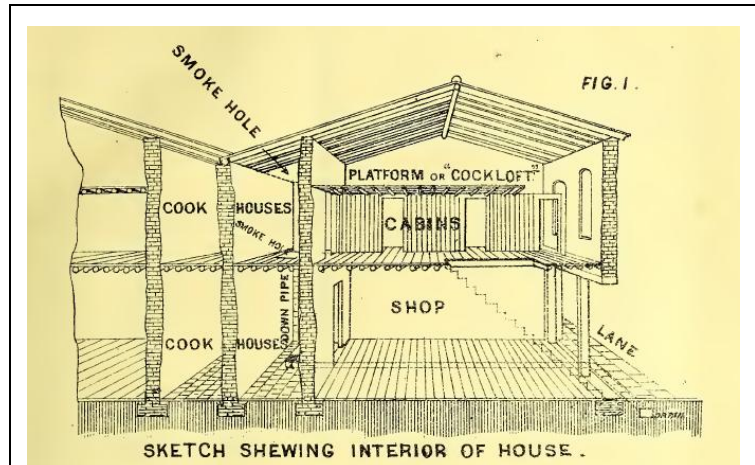
The building was used as a sugar and salt depot during the Japanese occupation in WWII, which is a good testimony of the food shortage and the struggle of civilians during the war. This adds another layer of historic significance to the building.

The building is historically significant due to its rarity, its construction age and its rich layers of history connected with the market, the evolvement of hygiene condition, the urban development and the life of the community.

2.2 Architectural Significance

120 Wellington is a typical first generation of shophouse that was built before 1894 plague. The description in Mr. Chadwick's Reports on the Sanitary Condition of Hong Kong (1882) about the local dwellings being

The usual building material is a blue Canton brick, granite from the local quarries is largely employed for door jambs and lintels over shop fronts. The usual roof is of segmental tiles, with semicircular tiles covering the vertical joints, forming ridges. Upper floors are made of China fir planks supported on round rafter. The street frontage of the house is narrow, being 13 to 16 feet only. The depth back from the street is large, varying from 30 to 60 feet. At the rear of the building, on each floor a portion about 7 feet deep is separated from the rest of the house to form the "cookhouse". If the site be level the houses are often built back-to-back, no lane or space being left between them.^[16]



(Fig.12) The layout of a typical local dwelling illustrated in Chadwick's Report, showing the construction of shophouse in 1880s.

The existing building offers an excellent opportunity to study the construction materials, technology and craftsmanship of shophouse 140 years ago, including Canton green-grey masonry walls, structural timber floor and timber staircase, granite-timber shop front, the cookhouse on the rear and tiled roof system.

Regarding the style of the building, it is difficult to define the style of the building, but is generally eclectic, like many other shophouses in Hong Kong. This means, a mix of European and Chinese architectural elements and features.

The building is constructed in Canton green-grey bricks however the façade is generally in a western appearance with rendered mouldings and keystones. The roof is a Cantonese pan-and-roll tile roof, however it is a double-layer roof which is used in colonial buildings not traditional local buildings. These facts further indicate the fusion of ethnic groups of European and Chinese during the late 1800s in this area.

This building is the finest and the only surviving example of local shophouse built immediately after

the 1878 Great Fire. Judging from the historic photos, the building is generally in a more European character containing European architectural elements on the façade, being two bay shop front with round arch openings and rendered moulding.

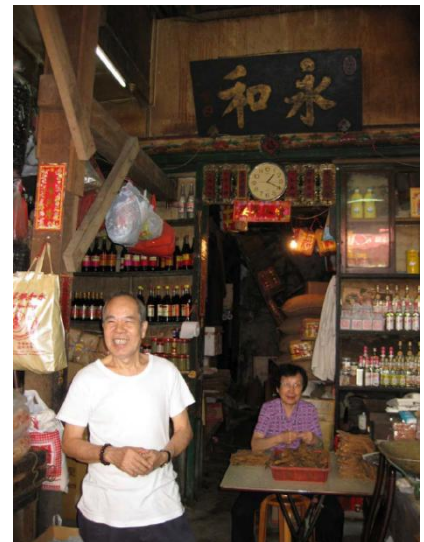
Being a shophouse, its layout is to suit its function. The original use of the ground floor was a gold and silver smith shop, considered as a high-end shop. The shop front at the ground floor had a verandah within the land lot creating a semi-external space which would help to attract customers. The verandah is believed to be blocked up to increase internal space, when it became a grocery shop. The entrance to the upper level was designed at the rear on Graham Street, separating the customers to the shop and the tenants to upper floors. Cantilevered balconies were on the upper floors, increasing usable floor areas. Cook houses were on the rare. The function of the building is an excellent example of a shophouse.

The building has now been vacant for more than 7 years and unfortunately is in a dilapidated condition which has caused some of the original fabric to be lost or damaged beyond repair. This includes the cantilever balconies, some of the timber windows and doors, some of the rendered mouldings, some of the timber floor boards/ joists, some of the roof timber purlins. It is vital to preserve the building to prevent its further dilapidation. It is feasible but challenging that these elements can be carefully restored following the clues on the remaining building fabric and historic photos.

2.3 Social Significance and Local Interest

The building is well recognised by the neighbourhood as "heritage". Simply being "old", in fact its historic building appearance is regarded as a visual landmark to the neighbourhood. Standing at the corner of Wellington Street and Graham Street, the building can be seen from various vistas and provides a nostalgic atmosphere to the neighbourhood.

The building was owned by different owners during its history, both European and Chinese, indicating the mix of ethnic group in this district. WingWoo Grocery shop, being a tenant on this building for 80 years, was one of the most famous traditional grocery shop in the district. It generally served the local community as this was a place where people gathered and acted as a community, connecting the past and present, according to the thesis by Christine Tong, *Documenting the historical and spatial significance of Wing Woo*.^[15]



(Fig. 13) Wing Woo Grocery Shop in 2008. (Photo by Christine Tong)

A Cantonese song "Wing Woo Ho" written and sung by local singer Louis Cheung is based on this building as the singer is deeply impressed by the history of the shop also the old feeling and values in behind the building. Wing Woo was unique due to its spatial arrangement of goods and business operation. It was also unique due to the values rooted deeply in behind this traditional shop: selling quality goods with low price, being decent to all kinds of customers.

Wing Woo was a good example to reflect the struggle of the immigrants in the old days of Hong Kong: They set up the business and rose from poverty in Hong Kong during an unrest environment in mainland China; they had to shut down their business during the Japanese occupation; they reached their prosperous era in the 1960s, following the continuous surge in population; they faded away competing against a new model of business; however they upheld values in running a decent business. Wing Woo, and the building, as the conveyer of these values, are important to depict the cultural identity, not only to the local community but also a greater extent to the Hong Kong people. As this kind of traditional shop faded away during the changing time, to preserve this building can perpetuate the collective memory of the community and will add value to the "old shop street" scheme proposed by the Urban Renewal Authority.

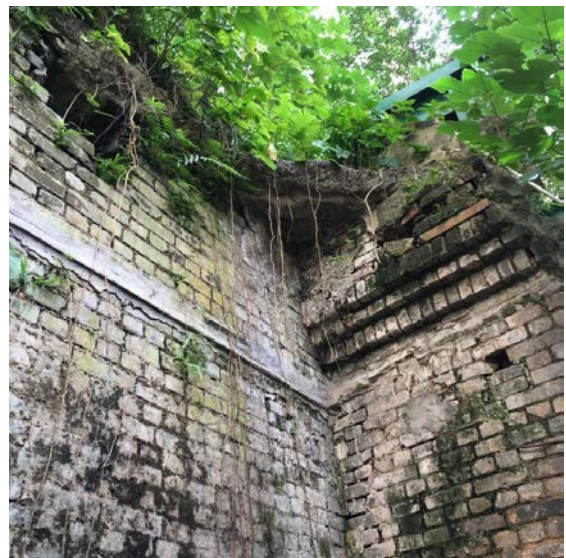
2.4 Group Value

120 Wellington Street, together with the shophouse remains of Cochrane Street/ Gutzlaff Street, are closely connected as the result of reconstruction from the 1878 Great Fire in Central. They are some of the only surviving fabric of shophouses predating 1903 Public Health and Buildings Ordinance which was built at a back-to-side layout or a back-to-back layout without a scavenging lane.

Grouped with some other shophouses in the district such as 172, 174, 176 Queen's Road Central (predated 1900), 60, 62 Hollywood Road (1920s), 99F Wellington Street (1920s) and 26A-C Graham Street (pre-war), 72 Des Voeux Road Central (1940),

they can well represent the early local dwellings and the evolvement during the late 1800s and early 1900s. Being a building cluster of historic shophouses, they are important as an integral component of a historic complex, which is the early local dwellings in the city centre of Hong Kong.

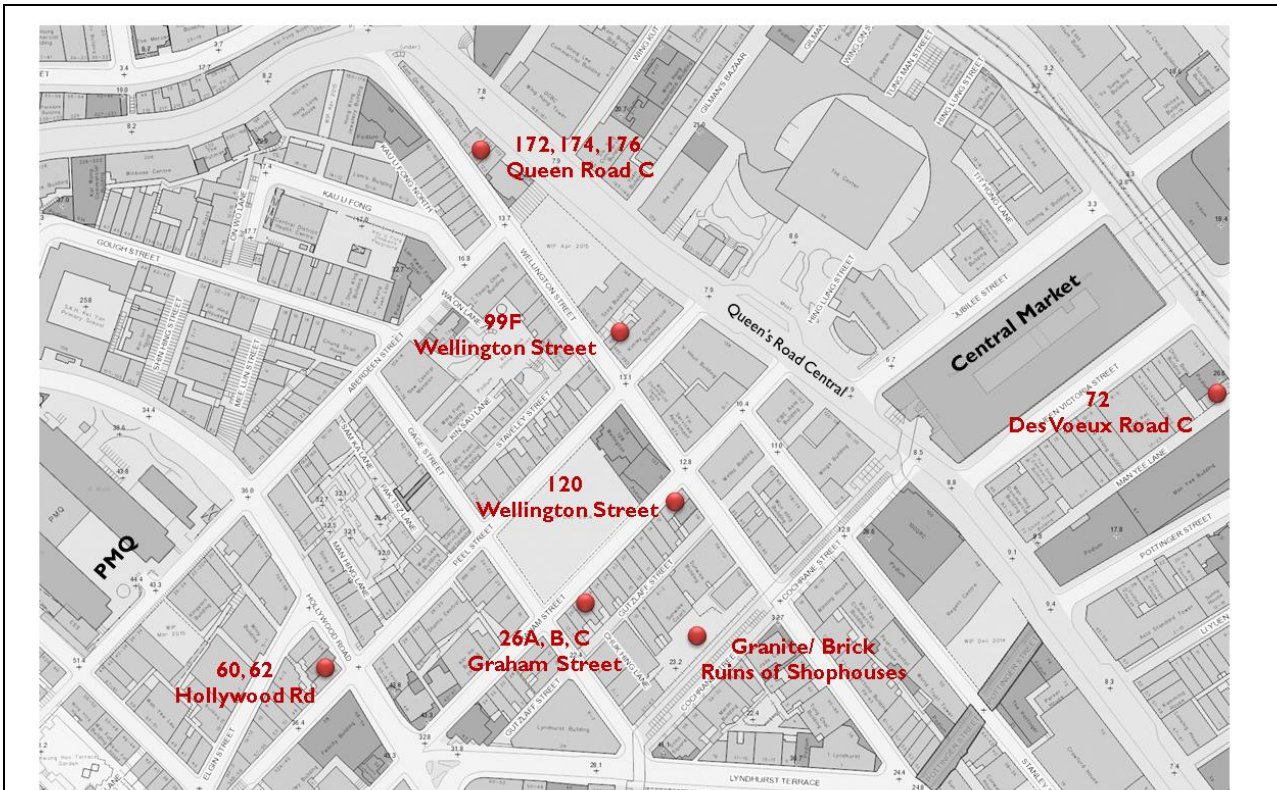
Being a corner building facing Graham Street and Wellington Street, although occupied as different



(Fig. 14) Remains of shophouses on Cochrane/ Gutzlaff Street.

shops in history, it was part of the vibrant street market, witnessing the development of the street market for almost 140 years.

In a larger scale, 120 Wellington Street is within walking distance to Central Market, Central Police Station Compound and Police Married Quarters (PMQ). These historic buildings are an indispensable part of Central, the city centre since the City of Victoria established in 1841. If the building is properly preserved, it will embody the spirit of old Central, which will be a great addition to our historic city centre.



(Fig.15) Locations of nearby historic shophouses in Central.



172, 174, 176 Queen's Road Central



99F Wellington St.






60, 62 Hollywood Rd.








26A, B, C Graham Street




3 Character Defining Elements

3.1 External Features

| Feature | Photo | Significance | Recommendation |
|---|---|--------------|---|
| Building façades (north elevation and west Elevation) |  | High | Alteration to masonry walls should be limited to minimum. Infill redundant openings, Indentify any structural repairs required and carry out repairs. |
| Building façades (south elevation and east Elevation) |  | Low | They used to be party walls. Openings can be formed for MoE requirements. |
| Granite piers and timber beams shop front and verandah |  | High | Remain in-situ. Remove graffiti and paint on granite. Fire retardant treatment to timber beam. |

| | | | |
|---|---|--------|--|
| Double layer pan-and-roll roof tiles |  | High | Remove vegetations. Repair/replace damaged tiles. |
| Window/ door openings and joinery |  | Medium | Reinstate French doors. Repair joinery as necessary. |
| Rendered moulding above openings |  | Medium | Renovate rendered mouldings where damaged/ missing. |
| Granite surround on ground floor window |  | Medium | Remove paint and express granite surround. |
| Sliding gate of Wing Woo |  | Medium | Keep in situ, redecorate as appropriate, hold open the gate. |

3.2 Internal Features

| Feature | Photo | Significance | Recommendation |
|--|---|--------------|--|
| Timber staircase and timber panel walls |  | High | Check termites. Repair/replace using like for like materials as necessary. |
| Roof timber |  | High | Check termites. Repair/replace using like for like materials as necessary. |
| Structural timber floor |  | High | Check termites. Repair/replace using like for like materials as necessary. |
| Internal CDEs to be further supplement by further inspection. | | | |

4 Conclusions and Recommendations

120 Wellington Street, Former Wing Woo Grocery Shop, is an important building. Built in 1879, it is the oldest surviving shophouse in Hong Kong. It is now the only example of the first generation of shophouse in Hong Kong that predates the 1894 plague. This building is indispensable for us to study the evolution of shophouse typology. The character defining elements on this building including tiled roof, Canton green-grey masonry wall, structural timber floor and staircase, granite pier - timber beam shop front are rare elements in surviving shophouse within Hong Kong.

The building was built after the great fire in 1878, the same time as the shophouse remains located in Cochrane/Gutzlaff Street. Together they form an important architectural group, demonstrating the evolution of shophouse typology and the urban development in Central.

Wing Woo, a grocery shop run on this building from 1930s and served the local community for nearly eighty years. It represents an old Hong Kong business mode - small street with small shops, which is part of the collective memory of Hong Kong people and an important intangible heritage to our society. Wing Woo enriches the social significance of the building greatly.

The building is important both externally and internally. To carefully preserve the entire building is responsible to the historic fabric of the city. This is in line with the mission of the Urban Renewal Authority:

to preserve by maintaining and restoring buildings of historical and architectural value, and to sustain local characteristics.

The following recommendations are suggested, in an order of urgency.

1) It is essential to carry out regular inspections and necessary repairs to the building.

Reason for this recommendation: The building is in a dilapidated condition since its vacancy. To ensure the safety of the building and public, it is necessary to carry out regular inspections and necessary repairs.

2) It is essential to preserve the entire building, not just the façade.

Reason for this recommendation: This building is of high historic, architectural, social and group value. It is important both for its external features and internal features. It is noticed that URA have a scheme to keep the building façade only. This is not appropriate. Keeping only the façade will result in a great loss of historic fabric.

3) It is essential to review the grading of the building. Grade I Historic Building is

recommended.

Reason for this recommendation: This building is of high significance. To grade the building is an appropriate way to ensure the building being properly taken care of.

4) It is recommended to revise the development scheme of the H18 Site C to incorporate the preservation of entire 120 Wellington Street.

Reason for this recommendation: It is well noted in URA's development scheme to H18 site C, the design is to construct a few 2-3 storeys building along Graham Street. This is desirable to maintain the of the overall scale and portion of buildings on the street. However, the detailed design of the hotel along Wellington Street is unknown. It is recommended to revise the development scheme to incorporate the preservation of entire 120 Wellington Street, which would add a great highlight in heritage conservation point of view.

5) The best way to conserve the building is to use the building.

Reason for this recommendation: The building can only be alive when the building is being used. This can also provide an opportunity for the public to understand and to enjoy the building.

6) The future use of the building should be cautiously selected.

Reason for this recommendation: Any change of use will require alteration which may include loss of historic fabric. Alteration of the building may be required so that the building can be used but should be carefully managed.

7) The external façades should be repaired and retained unaltered.

Reason for this recommendation: The building presents an impressive face to Wellington Street and Graham Street and is an important part of streetscape. Except for recommendation 9 it should be unaltered.

8) The change of internal layout of the building should be limited to minimum.

Reason for this recommendation: The internal layout of the building is significant to understand the layout of the shophouse. It would be acceptable to make some alterations to the layout so that the building can be used however these alterations should be limited to minimum.

9) Consideration should be given to reinstate the cantilever balconies on upper floors.

Reason for this recommendation: These balconies are part of the original design of the building. They are important to understand the overall appearance of the building the its layout. The design of the ironwork reflect the "popular" design in the second half of 19th century. The overall design of the balconies can refer to old photos. However the feasibility is subject to the structural appraisal of the building and approval from the Buildings Department.

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- [2] Valuation Table for Victoria, Hong Kong 1858-1947

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- [3] Inland Lot No. 173
- [4] The Remaining Portion of Inland Lot No.173 (12 Graham Street)
- [5] The Remaining Portion of Section A of Inland Lot Inland Lot No.173 (116 Wellington Street)
- [6] Section A of Sub-section 1 of Section A of Inland Lot No. 173 (118 Wellington Street)
- [7] The Remaining Portion of Sub-section 1 of Section A of Inland Lot No. 176 (120 Wellington Street)

Maps

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Old Photo

- [19] Photograph of Graham Street 1906 kindly provided by Mr Ko Tim Keung