

To: Legislative Council Members
Re: Submission Regarding the 'Star' Ferry Building and Queen's Pier

Submitted by John Batten
17 December 2006

Over the last week we witnessed ongoing protests against the demolition of the 'Star' Ferry Building. The historic 'Star' Ferry Clock Tower was demolished a few days ago; the passenger sections of the building will be demolished over the next few weeks.

I wish to make the following brief points:

1. In many ways we – all Hong Kong people – are responsible for the demolition of this historic building. Simply put, it was too little, too late.

2. It must be placed on record that the 'Star' Ferry Building was an important historic building that has now been destroyed. The building was important because:

a/ It is one of the very few historic buildings left in Hong Kong's built-up urban area.

b/ It was the welcoming gateway to millions of people over a 50 year period who arrived by ferry onto Hong Kong Island. It was a wonderful building providing totally appropriate landing facilities for passengers that had ridden on one of the great trips that the world has to offer: the simple but marvelous 'Star' Ferry trip from Tsim Sha Tsui. By destroying this building and moving the 'Star' Ferry Pier to another location has now diminished, belittled and demeaned that great trip.

c/ Architecturally, it was a fine example of a late modernist building. Hong Kong, historically, has tended to replicate architectural 'movements' many years after equivalent overseas movements. This was the case with the 'Star' Ferry Building when it was built in 1958 – the architectural style used harked back to equivalent buildings that had been built in Europe in the 1930s.

When the 'Star' Ferry building was built the Hong Kong CBD comprised only of low-rise buildings – the size and proportions of the building were entirely in keeping with its surrounding buildings and environment. Indeed, its unpretentious lines allowed it to mirror the form of the old Hong Kong Bank building that was situated inland directly behind it (and the low lines of the building allowed the Bank to retain an uninterrupted view of the Harbour).

Over the years the 'Star' Ferry Building was neglected – its great central atrium was clogged with crappy shops and the entrance into the building lost some of the mystique that it previously held (the 'Star' Ferry Building atrium is typical of train stations around the world – entrance into a light filled high-ceilinged chamber). The building was just 'taken for granted' by all of us.

The Clock Tower chimes were, however, always well maintained by Wharf Holding's 'Star' Ferry Company: the chimes were (albeit quieter) an exact copy of the chimes of London's Big Ben – atop the Parliament Buildings in Westminster. The tone of these chimes was perfect – I, for one, will miss them terribly.

3. The ephemeral things that makes Hong Kong such a special place are NOT being protected by our decision makers: over the last few years we have seen the destruction of Tiger Balm Gardens, Cloth Street, Bird Street, Wedding Card Street, Blake Pier.

Whole districts that have been designated urban 'slums' are now in the hands of the Urban Renewal Authority and will be renewed (read, however, destroy) - these include the magnificent 1930s terrace houses on Shing Wong Street, Central; vast areas of Wan Chai, To Kwa Wan, Tai Kok Tsui, Kwun Tong and the Graham Street wet market in Central. Historic buildings awaiting destruction include Central Market, Wan Chai Market, the historic building on Repulse Bay Beach. Even the designated historic monument buildings of Central Police Station and Victoria Prison await an uncertain fate – proposals to retain façades of buildings and building shopping centres in this unique precinct are absurd, but the responsible government entity given responsibility for this fragile historic area is the same entity that has responsibility for the tacky Santa's Town presently on show in Statue Square – the Hong Kong Tourism Commission!

5. It is a fact that the statutory bodies that deal with heritage issues - such as the Town Planning Board and the Antiquities Advisory Board - are stacked with government *ex-officio* members. A fair and open system of discussion about the protection of our history, heritage buildings and historic districts does not exist – that is why ALL of Hong Kong's heritage is presently under threat.

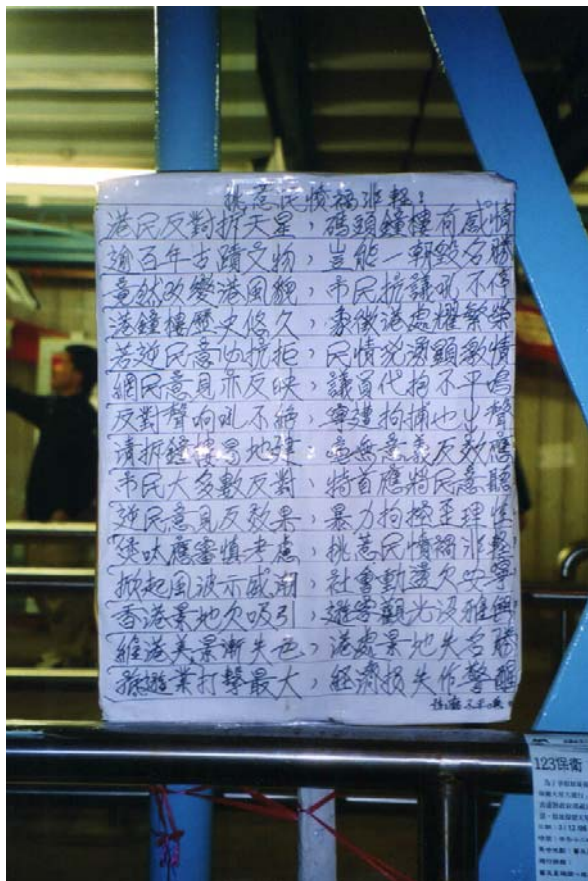
6. It is now time to thoroughly overhaul Hong Kong's laws dealing with heritage and urban planning. I urge legislators to demand that government immediately draws up replacement legislation that protects our heritage and insists on appropriate urban planning. Alternatively, legislators could put their political differences aside, join 'forces' and request government to allow the introduction of private members' bills that tackle these urgent heritage issues.

7. The protests this week about the destruction of the 'Star' Ferry Building have, again, very starkly shown the absurdity of Hong Kong's present 'executive led' government. Universal suffrage will be a huge step towards protecting Hong Kong's from the excesses of an entrenched - and rapidly growing - autocratic elite of administrative decision makers.

8. The COMPLETE building and fixtures of Queen's Pier be saved and relocated and that it continues to be used as a WORKING pier.

9. I attach the following photographs (taken by myself) of a variety of images, thoughts, heartfelt expressions and anger by members of Hong Kong's thinking public at the 'Star' Ferry Building over the last few days – they express, in a small way and are a record of, the utter disappointment and disbelief that the 'Star' Ferry Building has been destroyed:











[illegible][illegible]

"SOMEONE MAY SAY, BUT ARE WE SAYING
 THE OFFICIALS VOTED FOR AMERICA'S TOP SECRET
 INFORMATION AND THE CONFIDENTIALITY THAT REMAINS
 IN THEIR HANDS BUT THE GOVT. DOESN'T WANT
 TO DISCLOSE IT ON THE TV, THE PRESS AND COMMUNITY
 IT'S NOT OUR JOB TO ARGUE, BROADCASTERS
 TO BE INFORMED THE PUBLIC OPINION, FOR
 THE COMMISSION OF THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY
 SHOULD BE STRONGER, FASTER, LET THE ONLY ONE
 GET READY TO STRIKE BACK AGAIN!"

GOVT. OFFICIALS ARE LYING. WORD-PLAY
AND TRICKS ARE USED TO MISLEAD. THE GOVT.
OFFICIALS HAVE NOTHING ABOUT PROTESTERS. PROTESTERS
ARE NOT EVEN UNDERSTANDING THE CONCEPT OF
A PROTEST. PROTESTERS ARE NOT EVEN UNDERSTANDING
THE CONCEPT OF A PROTEST. PROTESTERS ARE NOT
EVEN UNDERSTANDING THE CONCEPT OF A PROTEST.
THE CONCEPT OF A PROTEST IS NOT UNDERSTOOD
BY THE PROTESTERS.

THE VOICE IS VERY CLEAR, LITTLE NOISE
REMARKS
1. I AM LEAVING TO THE DISCRETION OF THE JURY
2. THAT IS ALL THEY
3. I CAN ONLY AFFIRM AS FROM SOME
4. OF THE MANY THINGS I HAVE TO REMEMBER
5. REMEMBER REMEMBER
6. I AM LEAVING THEM TO THE JURY
7. I WANT TO BE NEAR HIM AND THERE

學生 葉宏謙 (編)
葉文浩 (理)
畢能輝 (查)
王浩賢 (查)
王華怡 (查)
市民 周恩中
朱凱迪
陳浩
加入

- ① 程樂葵 (5)
② 梁偉言
③ ~~梁偉言~~ (5)
梁志豪
④ 高展鴻 (5, 9)
⑤ 劉嘉麟





