

Tamsui Customs Wharf



新北市立淡水古蹟博物館
Tamsui Historical Museum, New Taipei City



QR Code

Photo: Shieh Wang-Lin Consultant: Llyn Scott



Dock Masonary

The Customs Wharf at Tamsui is divided into easterly, central, and westerly dock sections. The east and west ends of the dock are constructed from stone blocks cut from Guanyin Mountain and joined together by mortar made of sand and slaked lime. The central part of the dock was laid out with sandstone blocks from the Quilian quarry using a similar type of mortar. Several landings (not pictured) which consist of exposed aggregate steps of concrete and small washed stones allowed passengers and sailors to embark and disembark easily regardless of tidal levels.



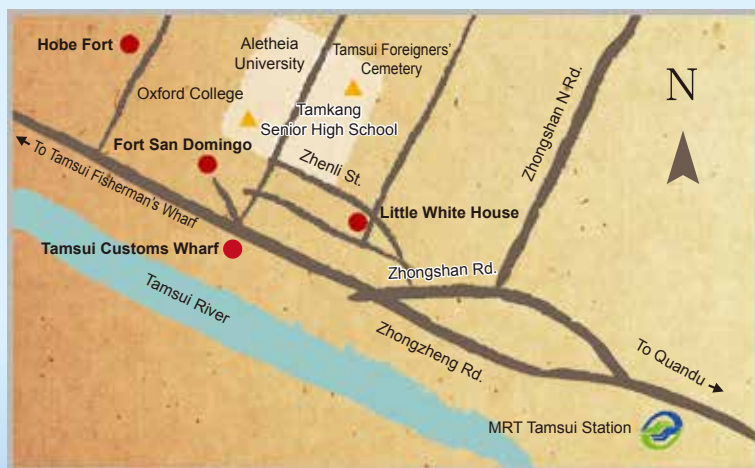
Early and Late Bollard Styles

The square shape of the smaller bollard is unique and differs from the cylindrical bollard. Sampans and junks moored at the smaller bollards, while larger vessels such as steam boats required the heavier, round bollards. Each of the square bollards is cut from a single stone; whereas the round bollards are poured concrete. Both are about thirty-six centimeters high and forty centimeters across the top. Numerous bollards along the quay are reminders of the bustling heydays of Tamsui Customs Wharf.



Naval Shipyard

The far west end of the wharf was a naval ship yard from 1949-1951, where the Sea Serpent Group refitted and tested submarines. A concrete ramp braced with iron joists extends from the dock in front of the Naval Defense Force barracks out into the water for military equipment to be unloaded and pulled ashore. This dock is made of a concrete and aggregate slab which originally was supported by sharp wooden pilings driven deep into the riverbed rock. The pilings have been replaced by a foundation of stone blocks and concrete aggregate.



Directions to Tamsui Customs Wharf Park :

The Tamsui Customs Wharf Park can be accessed by taking any of the various MRT lines directly to the Tamsui MRT Station and transferring to either bus #Red 26 or shuttle #836 to Fort Santo Domingo.

◆ Tamsui Harbor History

In 1858 (the 8th year of Xianfeng's reign), the Qing Dynasty signed the Treaty of Tianjin with England, France, the United States, and Russia which opened the trade ports of Taiwan. In July 1861 (June, Emperor Xianfeng's 11th year), British Consul Robert Swinhoe, who had mastered Mandarin and Hokkien languages while serving in China, arrived in Taiwan to inspect the trade ports and selected Hobe (沪尾) as its main trading port. On July 18, 1862, Hobe Port officially became the tariff collection center for Taiwan. In 1863, an Englishman, Sir John William Howell, assumed the duties of the first Commissioner of Hobe Customs, opening the era of foreign administration of Taiwan customs. Foreign customs officials were not only responsible for customs affairs, but also for port construction, harbor maintenance, investigation of ship accidents, mediation between Chinese and local workers, and rescue work.

In 1854 (the 4th year of Xianfeng's rule), China divided the original customs (haikwan) office into New Customs (also known as "Foreign Customs") and Domestic Customs (also known as "Old Customs"). The former levied cargo tariffs on goods crossing national borders, while the latter collected taxes on the transaction of goods within the country. As New Customs was responsible for collecting cargo tariffs on imported goods, the main counterparties were foreign officials; hence "New Customs" was placed under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Hobe New Customs was Taiwan's first customs agency in charge of foreign trade administration, and also was responsible for the subsequent establishment of the Keelung, Anping, and Dagou branches. Hobe Port Customs became the head customs agency for all of Taiwan. In 1916, the main customs office was moved out of Tamsui; and in 1921 it was transferred to Keelung. The original Tamsui Customs Wharf became a branch office, and was renamed

"Customs House for the Office of the Governor-General, Tamsui Branch."

Finally in 1945, control of Tamsui Customs Wharf changed hands from the Japanese authorities to the Republic of China government. Afterwards, the Haiguang Artist Labor Team, River Coast Guard Units, the Navy's Fourth Company Haichiao (Sea Serpents/Fast Attack Boat Group, FABG), the Marine Corps Seventh Company, and the Third Camp Guard were all stationed in the area.

In the past, the Tamsui Customs Wharf was a restricted military compound and off-limits to civilians. On rare occasions, citizens might catch a glimpse of performers from the Haiguang Artist Labor Team practicing Huqin under the rows of banyan trees. A well-known artist, Shen Hai-Rong, was a member of the first graduating class of the National Naval Haiguang Junior Academy of Dramatic Art. On June 27, 2000, New Taipei City officials declared Tamsui Customs Wharf a city-designated heritage site and placed it under the governance of the Cultural Affairs Bureau of the New Taipei City government. Since then, the area has been transformed into a cultural park. For convenience, a new bridge was built across what was once the Customs Commissioner's private dock at the Zhongzheng Road entrance to the Tamsui Customs Wharf connecting the Rongti (Banyan Tree) Riverwalk to the Tamsui Customs Wharf area. The public can stroll along the entire waterfront and experience a variety of scenes from colonial maritime history to the neon lights of lanes lined with shops, souvenir arcades, and eateries. After four years of renovation, the historic vitality and elegance of the wharf has been recaptured; and to top it off, the harbor view facing west from the dock is the perfect place from which to enjoy Tamsui's spectacular sunsets.

◆ Tamsui Customs Wharf Development

Built in 1869, the Tamsui Wharf customs area consists of three sites: the Customs House, Consular residences, and dock. The Tamsui Customs House vicinity includes the dock, wharf offices, naval barracks, inspection depot, import warehouse, and the defunct parking lot below Fort Santo Domingo. The Consular Residence area was built between 1866 and 1875, and includes the Customs Commissioner's residence and boarding house. The Tamsui Customs Commissioner's residence, which was built during the Qing Dynasty and nicknamed by Tamsui citizens "Little White House," is the only remaining structure. It was named a national heritage in 1997. The construction of the dock and wharf also began during the Qing Dynasty and continued through the Japanese occupation until the completion of the wharf, most of which is still visible today.

■ The Qing Dynasty Period

During the Qing Dynasty period, the wharf for Hobe Port was located behind Hobe Street, roughly across from where Douglas Lapraik & Co. is situated today. At that time, merchant ships, however, moored along the dock that extends from today's Tamsui MRT Station westward all the way to the Duchuantou Ferry point, which is quite some distance from Hobe New Customs. In 1893, about thirty years after Hobe Port was established, piers began to appear in front of the Hobe New Customs office.

■ The Japanese Colonial Period

During the early part of the Japanese colonial period, several piers, disembarkation landings (heyangchang), berths for vessels, and dry docks began to appear on the wharf. The land in between the Customs Wharf, located in front of the Hobe New Customs, and the Hobe Fishing Port offices (Tamsui's first fishing pier), was still an expansive beach. It was not until the 1900s and the launching of the tidelands landfill project that the beach changed to the present shoreline.

During this period, construction on the Hobe New Customs wharf focused mainly on surface water landfills for the construction of the first, second, and third inspection depots, as well as buildings on the wharf. Landfills after the second inspection depot was built drained off water opposite the original Hobe New Customs office as well as the beaches between the Hobe fishing pier and the dock, turning this whole area into the wharf. In addition, the east, central, and west sections of the dock that are directly across from the Tamsui Customs House and the British Consulate are currently the Tamsui Customs Wharf cultural park. Once the Tamsui Customs Wharf landfill project was finished, several new buildings were built, including warehouses, military barracks, residences, and inspection depots. Perhaps the warehouse, however, might have re-used one of the restored buildings from the Qing Dynasty, making it one of the earliest structures inside the Tamsui Customs Wharf cultural park.

■ National Government Period

When the Republic of China government took over Taiwan in 1945, the Tamsui Customs House and the Customs Wharf were placed under the jurisdiction of the R.O. C. military. Houses constructed of reinforced concrete subsequently were built, but the warehouse and inspection depot from the Japanese colonial period were left untouched and were used as naval barracks. The Zhongyi Rock stele and reflecting pool were added by the Navy's Fourth Company, the Sea Serpents, when it was stationed in Tamsui.



▲ Tamsui River



▲ Harbor view of the Tamsui Customs Wharf



▲ Interior of the second floor of the customs official's residence modeled after English customs houses showing king-post trusses and crossbeams mounted above white stuccoed walls.



▲ Exterior of a scaled replica of the residence built in 1858 for lower-rank foreign customs officers, mostly Brits. Although modeled after English customs houses, the two-layered façade of sandstone blocks and bricks that mark the first and second stories is an innovation designed to protect against water infiltration.



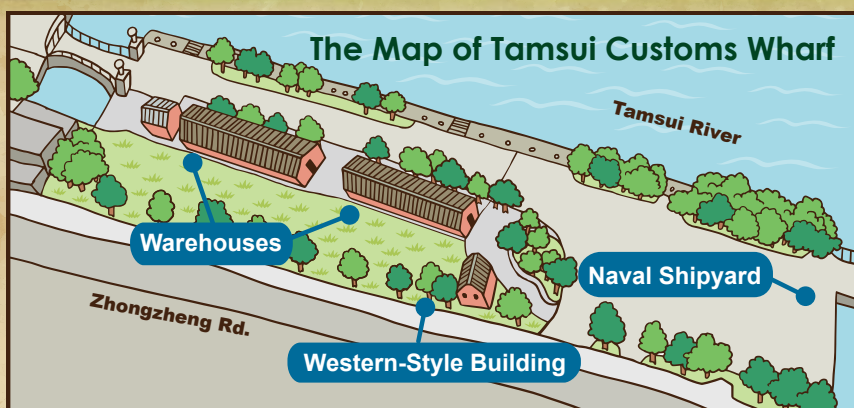
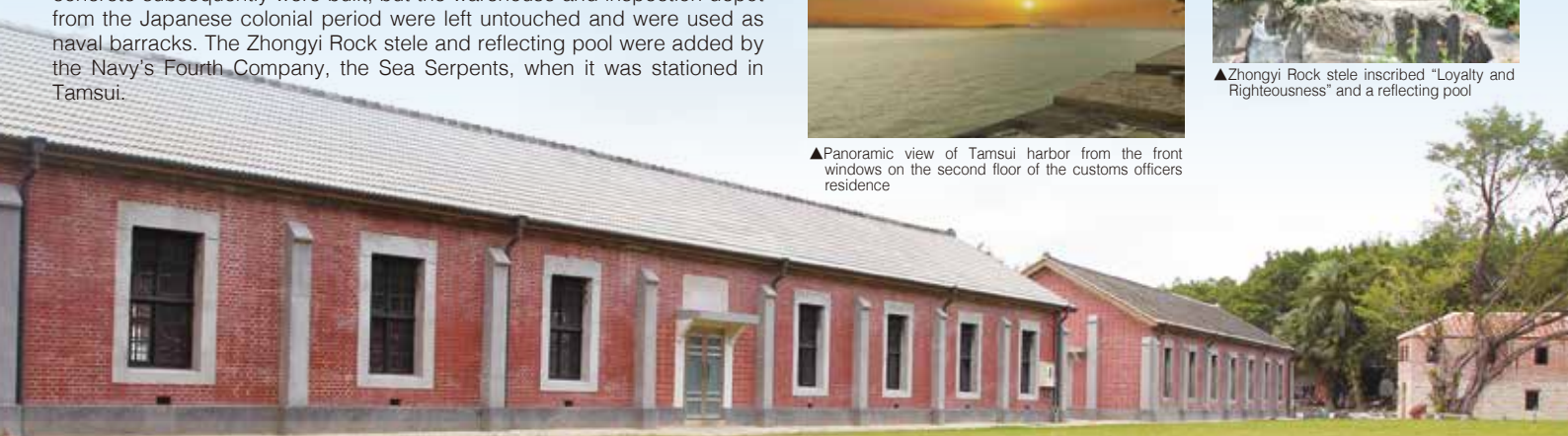
▲ Wooden plank staircase and handrail with spindle balusters leading to the second floor



▲ Zhongyi Rock stele inscribed "Loyalty and Righteousness" and a reflecting pool



▲ Panoramic view of Tamsui harbor from the front windows on the second floor of the customs officers' residence



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Closing Time: The first Monday of each month (postponed until the next day in the event of a national holiday or complementary holiday)

★ The opening hours for Lunar New Year's Eve, New Year's Day, and other officially scheduled days will be announced separately.