

ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY, HONG KONG BRANCH

NEWSLETTER

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20th October, 2003

Council members 2003-2004

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Mr. Robert Horsnell, Co-opted Member	Mr. David McKellar, Co-opted Member
Dr. Betty Wei, Co-opted Member	Miss Josephine Wong, Co-opted Member

We are very pleased to welcome Mr. Geoffrey Emerson, Mr. Chan Kwok-shing, Miss Josephine Wong and Mr. David McKellar as newly co-opted members of the Council. Geoffrey Emerson is former President of the Hong Kong History Society, was Vice Principal of St. Paul's College and has been an active member of our Activities Committee for some time. Chan Kwok-shing is a committee member of the South China Research Circle, Josephine Wong is a Curator of the Hong Kong Museum of History and David McKellar is a lawyer who is extremely interested in every facet of Hong Kong's history. For further information about the South China Research Circle, please read the first article under "RAS Business" on page 8 of this newsletter.

Mr Stephen Selby, an RAS member and convenor of the Asian Traditional Archery Research Network (ATARN), captivated his audience on 29th August 2003, with a talk entitled "Chinese Archery – An Unbroken Tradition?" He began by showing a Chinese bow, a reproduction of a Qing Dynasty bow, which he described as "a design with disaster in mind", meaning something will easily go wrong. Before calling upon a member of the audience to help him string the bow, Mr. Selby warned his audience of the possible dangers. Fortunately all went well! He also showed a barrel shaped arrow of ingenious design, e.g. thicker in the centre than at the ends to help keep its balance, and he talked about the different kinds of arrowheads.

After quickly capturing his audience's attention, Mr. Selby began tracing archery and its major role in Chinese history, starting from the pre-Shang period and ending in the 20th Century. He explained clearly, with the aid of an excellent powerpoint presentation, how archery was used in rituals, including hunting and dancing, magic and, of course, military use. Even Confucius said he was an archer, and archery was a subject studied by the aristocrats (males only, however), right up until the early 1900s. Chinese archery was influenced by several foreign cultures including the Mongols, the Turks and the Japanese. To compare Chinese archery with Western archery, Mr. Selby explained how much more Chinese archery involved: strategy, religion, technology, sport/hunting, literature folklore, medicine/psychology, philosophy and ritual. For example, with regard to medicinal use, archery was prescribed for treating asthma.

A lively question session followed the talk, including a very amusing demonstration of using a bow on horseback and the difficulties involved. The talk was followed by a visit the following day to the newly-opened exhibition of Asian Traditional Archery at the Hong Kong Museum of Coastal Defence on 30th

August, and Mr. Selby also invited everyone to attend a Tradition Archery Festival on 26th October at the Chaiwan Siu Sai Wan Sports Ground, where there will be demonstrations of Japanese, Korean, Bhutanese, Mongolian, Tibetan and Chinese archery. Those who would like more information are welcome to go to <http://www.atarn.org>.

On 5th September Philip Snow gave a very detailed and informative lecture to a packed hall based on his recent book *The Fall of Hong Kong: Britain, China and the Japanese Occupation*. Several years diligent research among British, Chinese and Japanese sources was reflected in his breadth of knowledge of this fascinating but often misunderstood subject.

On Saturday 20th September a group of members were treated to a tour of the Central Conservation Section of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department at the Hong Kong Heritage Museum. The head of the Conservation department, Mr S W Chan, and some of his team of specialists, gave us a fascinating review of the many techniques they use to conserve the 200,000 collection items in their care. Items requiring treatment cover a huge range including books, manuscripts, textiles, carpets, silks, furniture and wooden or bamboo items, marble, paintings, pottery and metallic objects. They range from the tiny, requiring delicate and painstaking microscopic work, to the other extreme, for example, the 550 tonnes, 60 metre long fireboat, the Alexander Grantham, soon to be displayed near Tai Koo Shing.

Among the specialist equipment we saw were the nitrogen gas fumigator used for pest control management, a high-pressure steam cleaner used for cleaning marble, an infra-red spectroscope and polarizing microscope, currently being used in identifying and cleaning paint layers. Following the August lecture by Stephen Selby on Archery in China, it was interesting to see work being carried out on a bow he had found. Through careful work the staff were identifying the types of wood and adhesive used, and were dating the ancient piece. Likewise, it was gratifying to see that books donated to the RAS library from the Arnold Graham collection featured prominently in the displays on routine pest and humidity control. No doubt Arnold would have been well pleased to see the care taken to conserve his collection!

More than twenty members of the Society formed about half those who attended the Seminar at the University of Hong Kong on Thursday 9th October on the subject "Sino-Indian Interactions in the 18th and 19th Centuries: Parsees, Armenians and Muslims in Macao, Guangzhou and Hong Kong". A series of extremely interesting lectures was enjoyed by those who attended, throwing a great deal of light on this fascinating subject. Among the speakers was our long-standing Honorary Vice-President, Rev. Carl Smith, who spoke no less than three times. At the start of the Seminar, Prof. Wong Siu-lun, the Director of the Centre of Asian Studies at the University of Hong Kong, gave a speech praising Carl's contributions to local historical studies and, in particular, the generosity he has always shown in helping younger scholars, before appointing him "Distinguished Fellow" of the Centre. It was a great privilege for us to be there and applaud this very well-deserved honour. Congratulations once again, Carl!

A visit was arranged on 11th-12th October to take the theme of this Seminar further for the benefit of Society Members. We met at 7.00 a.m. at Hung Hom, to take the first through-train to Canton, and were met at Canton by Mr Lo King-sang of the Cultural Affairs Bureau, who had assisted in setting up our programme. We went first to the ancient Main Mosque (the Wai Shing Mosque), founded, it is believed, in 627 as perhaps the first Mosque established outside Arabia. Here we were met by Mr Yusuf Ma Kwong-shing, of the Kwangtung Islamic Association, who spoke to the party on the history of Islam in Canton. We inspected the Tang Minaret, and also looked at the Sung carved panels around the courtyard, the Yuan, Ming, and early Ching inscriptions in both Chinese and Arabic, and looked at both the main Worshipping-Hall (mostly an early twentieth century building), and the Women's Worshipping-Hall (mostly a Ming structure). We also looked at the iron rings set into the courtyard for the slaughter of cattle during the Islamic New Year festivities. From the Wai Shing Mosque we went to the Hao Pan Mosque. This Mosque was founded in the Ming, and nearly all of the present structure dates to 1465. Built in an entirely Chinese style, it has miraculously preserved almost all its original fittings and woodwork. Unfortunately, during the Cultural Revolution, the gardens of the Mosque were used to build a singularly graceless factory (part of which is now being re-developed as an Islamic Old-Folks Centre for the Muslim community). After this visit, the party went to a Sinkiang Restaurant for an Islamic meal, accompanied by Mr Ma. An interesting meal, particularly for those who liked mutton, and "sheep giblets"!

After lunch, the party, again accompanied by Mr Ma, visited the tomb of Abu Wanggus, the uncle of the Prophet, who brought the Islamic faith to Canton in 627, and whose tomb is revered by all Muslims in Canton as a particularly holy spot. The tomb is surrounded by an extensive Islamic graveyard, a very quiet and sylvan spot. Mr Ma pointed out some of the more interesting graves, and two of the few surviving Imperial Pai Lau in Kwangtung (one to a chaste widow, the concubine of a Muslim general, who committed suicide rather than live after her husband's death, and the other a mark of Imperial esteem to an Islamic family whose filial piety was particularly marked – ten generations of the family being buried there in one plot).

None of these places are open to the public, and it was a great privilege to be able to get inside them and to achieve such a thorough understanding of the long and outstanding history of the Islamic community of Canton, and to learn something of its present state and hopes for the future. In the late afternoon, the party had a walking-tour through Shamian, led by Dr Joseph Ting, before going to the Panxi Restaurant for a "Mini Imperial Banquet" in the evening – excellent food in a very lovely room.

On Sunday 12th, the party (by then consisting of 45 members of the Society), went by boat down-river to Whampoa. Landing at French Island we paid a quick visit to the Foreigners' Cemetery there, which has been well restored in recent years. This is open to the public, but access is very difficult (the only access is through a military base, for which special permission is required), so, once again, it was a great privilege to be able to visit. After the visit to the Foreigners' Cemetery we took light-buses to Danes' Island for the high-point of the day's trip: the visit to the Parsee Cemetery there. This lies on the top of a hill within the grounds of the Huangpu Shipyard, and, yet once again, we could only go after special arrangements were made for access. We were lucky to be accompanied on this trip by Dr Guo Deyan, the great expert on the Parsees in Canton, who had given a most enlightening talk on this Cemetery at the October 9th Seminar. Access up the hill to the summit is extremely difficult (the hill is covered in an impenetrable mass of foliage): three stalwart village youths wielding machetes had to cut us a path up the hill, indeed! We did, however, succeed in reaching the grave area, and saw the gravestones, photographs of which Dr Guo had shown at the Seminar (leading to amazement as to the quality of those photographs – given the condition of the site, an immense amount of work must have gone into getting those photographs!)

We also visited the Parsee Picnic House, a very elegant, large, two-storey villa built in the 1920s on what was then the waterfront at the foot of the Cemetery Hill (it is now in the middle of the Shipyard). This was built on the site of a building used for funeral rituals when the Cemetery was in use, and then later as a place where Parsee families from Hong Kong could spend a weekend relaxing in the countryside.

After an excellent and copious lunch at a restaurant on French Island, we took a ferry over to Whampoa Village, to visit a large temple (wrecked in the Cultural Revolution, but now, hopefully, about to be restored – access was given by the courtesy of Mr Yeung, the Whampoa Village Headman). We also visited three of the no less than 36 Ancestral Halls in the village, including a particularly fine one built by Mr Wu Ah-kei (the "Mr Whampoa" of Singapore in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries). And then, rather weary, we returned by coach to Hong Kong.

All in all, this proved, despite the very oppressive and humid weather, a fascinating and very worthwhile tour. All of those who went on the trip learnt a lot about the Muslim and Parsee communities and their history. We are all now very eager for the visit to the Parsee Community in Hong Kong (alas, this tour is now fully booked) on November 7th, when we will visit the Hong Kong Parsee Cemetery (where, luckily, access will be very much easier than at Dane's Island!), the Zoroastrian Prayer-Hall (where we will have a short talk on the Parsee Community in Hong Kong today, and enjoy a meal of Parsee food), plus the Jewish and Colonial Cemeteries.

Up-coming Activities of the South China Research Circle

Guided Tour of the Hua-Kuang Festival

Cantonese opera performers celebrate the birthday of their protecting deity, Hua-Kuang, every year on the 28th of the Ninth Lunar Month. The ritual includes inviting Hua-Kuang to the worshipping site (which is always within the opera theatre or performing space), and then performing an opera on how the goddess Guan-yin entered Nirvana.

Miss Lum Man-yee, an expert on Cantonese opera as well as a tutor of the Chinese Civilisation Centre, City University of Hong Kong, will lead a visit to the Hua-Kuang Festival as it will be celebrated at the Sunbeam Theatre, North Point. Due to limited space in the theatre, this visit will be limited to 15 people. Places will be offered on a first-come-first-served basis. The visit will be conducted in **Cantonese**.

Date: 23rd October 2003

Meeting Place and Time: 13.45 p.m. at the main entrance to the Sunbeam Theatre (near the North Point MTR Station)

Cost: This visit is free.

This activity is organised by the South China Research Circle, but RAS Members are also welcome to participate. If interested in attending, please contact Miss Lum Man-yee by E-mail (cilum@cityu.edu.hk).

Update on Carl Smith

Following on from Geoffrey Roper's article on Carl in the August newsletter, Geoffrey has asked me to mention that Carl's medical treatment in Hong Kong was successful, and that he was soon back to work in Macau. He was one of the key speakers at the seminar on Parsees, Armenians and Muslims in Macau, Guangzhou and Hong Kong at the Hong Kong University on 9th October and seemed in very good health.

Friends of the RAS Hong Kong Branch in UK

For those members returning to live in the U.K., the Friends organise lectures and visits on a regular basis throughout the U.K. For joining details contact Paul Bolding at pbolding@bigfoot.com. Any Hong Kong members visiting the U.K. are very welcome to attend any of their functions.

On 15th November, Martin Palmer will give a talk to the Friends on *Da Qin – an Imperial Christian Site of the Tang Dynasty*, the same lecture he gave to the RASHKB last year. This will take place at 2:30 p.m. in the Main Building of SOAS, Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square, London, WC1. A lunch has been arranged beforehand at 12 noon at Poons Restaurant, 50 Woburn Place, Russell Square. Anyone interested in attending should contact either Paul Bolding on 020 7684 5811 or Rosemary Lee on 01491 873276 or Email to rosemary.lee@talk21.com. Their annual Chinese New Year lunch is planned for 31st January, 2004.

Recent Publications

RAS Life Member Dr. Gillian Bickley's latest book has recently been published.

For the Record and other Poems of Hong Kong, by Gillian Bickley, Proverse Hong Kong, September 2003. Pbk with 4 colour cover, matte lamination; perfect sewn; 5.5" w x 8.25" h; 120 pages. ISBN: 962-85570-2-5. HK\$75.00: Hong Kong; £9.95: United Kingdom; C\$23.95: Canada; US\$16.95: USA.

In the early 1970's, the Royal Asiatic Society held a meeting at which the Government Archivist, Mr A. I. Diamond, presented the photographic



symposium, please go to www.riccimac.org and look in either English or Chinese under Current Events and then Cultural Events, where the name of the symposium appears, and you can view the programme. If you wish to attend, a pre-registration form is available from the Institute at Ave. Cons. Ferr. D'Almeida, 95-E, Macau, Tel: +853 532 536, Fax: +853 568 274 or Email to riccimac@macau.ctm.net.

The Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland

The Society, at 60 Queen's Gardens, London W2 3AF, has a busy lecture programme which may interest members visiting London. On 13th November Professor Jessica Rawson (Warden, Merton College, Oxford) will give a talk entitled *'The Universe in Miniature: Tombs in Ancient China'*. This Asian Arts Week lecture will be held at the Society of Antiquaries, Burlington House, Piccadilly. On December 11th, for the Annemarie Schimmel Memorial Lecture, Professor Carl Ernst (Department of Religious Studies, University of North Carolina) will give a talk entitled *'Sufi Interpreters of Yogic Practices'* at 60 Queen's Gardens, starting at 6 p.m., followed by a reception. For further information Email info@royalasiaticsociety.org or go to www.royalasiaticsociety.org.

The Textile Society of Hong Kong

Following the success of their first Textile Bazaar last year, the Textile Society of Hong Kong will hold their second bazaar on Saturday, November 8th, from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. at the Fringe Club, Central.

The Hong Kong Natural History Society

Membership of the Hong Kong Natural History Society is open to anyone with an interest in the Hong Kong countryside. The Society organises monthly outings, which consist of hikes in the winter months and boat trips to the remoter islands during the summer months. Most outings take place on a Sunday and have leaders who will guide the party and point out items of interest. Memoirs are published from time to time, which are available to members, and there is a small library of natural history books that members can access. Membership is only \$100 for a year for an individual or \$150 for a couple. Further details may be obtained by writing to the Hon. Secretary, The Hong Kong Natural History Society, GPO Box 4369, Hong Kong or Email to johnjones@netvigator.com.

Department of Anthropology, The Chinese University of Hong Kong – Friday Seminars

Oct. 24 **Prof. Sidney Mintz**, Department of Anthropology, Johns Hopkins University, *"Finding the Individual in the Global: How Many Globalizations?"*

Nov. 7 **Dr. Björn Kjellgren**, Honorary Research Associate, Department of Anthropology, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, *"Viewed from Afar: Swedish Images of China from the 17th to the 21st Century"*

Nov. 21 **Prof. Li Minghuan**, Professor, Institute of Anthropology, Xiamen University, *"Emergence of a New Qiaoxiang in Fujian and its Links with Europe"*

Seminars take place at 12:30-2:00 p.m. in Room 401 Humanities Building, New Asia College, CUHK.

