

ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY, HONG KONG BRANCH

NEWSLETTER

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20th June, 2004

Council members 2004-2005

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

Correction to April newsletter

In our April newsletter, page 2, penultimate line, Mr. Robert McKellar should read Mr. David McKellar. Apologies to David for the error.

Dr. Betty Wei Peh T'i, a Council Member and Qing historian, gave an interesting and highly amusing talk to the Society on 23rd April 2004 at the City Hall. The subject of the talk was Chengde, the summer capital of the Qing Emperors Kangxi (r 1662-1722) and Qianlong (r 1736-1795), and the title was "Messengers from God and Mammon: Jesuit Missionaries and Lord Macartney at Chengde during the 17th and 18th Centuries".

Dr. Wei used overhead transparencies to illustrate her talk, showing some of the famous 36 vistas built by Kangxi. An important part of the capital was the huge hunting ground, and Dr. Wei explained that three circles of soldiers were used to gather animals for the hunt, small game like deer and rabbits. Kangxi cleverly kept some of the Mongol princes in Chengde to hunt and enjoy themselves, rather than threatening the Manchu rule. Pointing out that nothing is really new, she mentioned that today we may have Sars, but then the danger was smallpox; Mongol princes who had had smallpox were invited to Beijing, but those who hadn't stayed in Chengde. The Jesuits were especially important in contributing maps of China, which were designed in Chengde, and printed in Paris, interesting even Louis XIV. In the 18th Century, Lord McCartney visited Chengde in his failed attempt to open China to British trade and diplomatic relations. Unfortunately time ran out before questions could be asked – a reason for another talk in the future?

On Saturday, 24th April, 30 members enjoyed a guided tour of the wonderful Treasures of the Chengde Summer Palace Exhibition at the Hong Kong Museum of History. Many of the beautiful artifacts had not been shown in Hong Kong before and included some exquisite Tibetan Buddhist images from the Eight Outlying Temples and items from the daily life of the Qing Emperors at Chengde. One particularly interesting item was a gilt bronze manual calculator, which was given to the Emperor by Jesuit missionaries.

A full house greeted Dr. Patrick Conner's talk on 27th April 2004, entitled "Expat and Export – the relationship between George Chinnery and Lamqua". Currently a director of the Martyn Gregory Gallery, London, and a specialist on the work of George Chinnery, Dr. Conner was in Hong Kong for an exhibition and sale of Chinnery's works. It was fortunate he was able to find time to speak to the Society.

Dr. Conner traced Chinnery's life in Asia, going first to India and then to the China Coast in 1825. A Chinnery family legend says that Lamqua was a houseboy with a family Chinnery lodged with in Macau and was taught by him, but Dr. Conner said it was more likely that Lamqua was already an established artist before Chinnery arrived in Macau. There is no record of Chinnery ever teaching anyone after his arrival on the China coast. Lamqua probably just copied Chinnery's style. He charged less than Chinnery for his portraits and painted much more than Chinnery, many of his paintings ending up in North America where they can be seen today at the Peabody Essex Museum outside Boston. A letter dated 1827 shows there was a commercial relationship between Chinnery and Lamqua in Canton, but it is questionable if there was a social relationship. A spirited question session concluded a most pleasant and fascinating lecture.

Those who attended the talk and slide show given by Dr. Brian Shaw and Professor Anthony Hedley on 14th May 2004, were greeted by a wonderful display of enlargements of photographs taken by Professor Hedley in Bhutan during the 2003 Society visit. These photographs were on display around three sides of the lecture room at the City Hall. Later, Professor Hedley showed slides of many of these photographs and talked about them, after first giving an introduction about the cameras and lenses he used.

Dr. Brian Shaw, who was the leader of the Society's first visit to Bhutan in the 1970s and again in February 2002 and 2003, and has visited Bhutan more than 30 times in the intervening period, entitled his talk, "Bhutan: a 'just in time' polity". Dr. Shaw explained his title, coming from a common technique in Bhutan of postponing many important decisions until the last minute, so that all factors, both positive and negative, can be taken into consideration and thereby serve the best interests of the state. Dr. Shaw then discussed some of the many problems facing Bhutan, situated as it is between two great powers, China and India. Though there are some unresolved issues over two sectors on the northern and western border with China and even a few small areas in the south and east in dispute with India, caused in part by re-alignment of river courses, Dr. Shaw felt these can be accommodated in time. Overall, he judged that policy-makers during the past four decades have strengthened the sovereign status of the kingdom and, by generally effective use of external aid, have laid the basis for a significant improvement in education and health standards of the population. This is a good basis for survival in the face of future challenges.

On Sat June 5th 15 RAS members met at the Center on Queen's Road, Central, for an Architectural Tour led by Mr. Raymond Fung Wing-kee. A senior government architect, who grew up on Hollywood Road, Mr. Fung enthusiastically described the area before the Center was built. Many members remembered the old narrow streets, selling fabrics, eggs, and traditional Chinese medicines.

Next stop was Lyndhurst Terrace, near to a one-time 'red light' district with brothels frequented by Europeans. The site of the first Catholic Cathedral was pointed out at the junction of Wellington Street and Pottinger Street. When it became too small for the congregation, the Cathedral moved to its present site on Caine Road.

President, Pat Hase then pointed out the place on Hollywood Road where a stream had run down from the Peak, bringing the only source of fresh water for this part of the island. This had attracted squatters in 1841, who then polluted the water, until the government moved them to Tai Ping Shan. The area became known as '*jung wan*' in Chinese or 'middle bazaar' and Central is known by this name today.

Recent Publications

We are delighted to announce the very recent publication of *Serving Hong Kong: The Hong Kong Volunteers*, published by the Hong Kong Museum of Coastal Defence, to mark the 150th anniversary of the founding of this esteemed organisation. Several present and past RASHKB Council members have been involved in the writing and editing of this book, including Past President Dr. James Hayes, Dr. Solomon Bard, Dr. Dan Waters, Tim Ko and Josephine Wong. Dr. Solomon Bard was Hon. Colonel of the Regiment in 1990. Sir David Ford wrote the Forward to the book and RAS Council Member Dr. Joseph Ting and Chairman of the Volunteers Association, Mr. Ron Taylor, wrote the Prefaces.

The history of the Royal Hong Kong Regiment (The Volunteers) forms an important chapter of our past. Founded in 1854 when the city was in its infancy and disbanded in 1995, by which time Hong Kong had become a metropolis in this part of the world, the Hong Kong Volunteers have not only witnessed the phenomenal changes that have taken place in Hong Kong in the last 150 years, but have contributed significantly to its stability and growth prior to its disbandment.

The glorious past of the Hong Kong Volunteers now forms an integral part of a Permanent Exhibition on the history of coastal defence at the Hong Kong Museum of Coastal Defence, which is located where the Volunteers fought heroically against the invading Japanese and sacrificed their lives in December 1941.

RAS Council Member and Immediate Past President Dr. Dan Waters voluntarily edited all the text and gave invaluable advice and RAS Council Member Tim Ko's enthusiasm and expert guidance enabled the publication of the book. The book is illustrated with around 500 photographs, covering most of the century and a half of the history of the Volunteers. This nicely produced book is available from the Hong Kong Museum of History bookshop and is very good value at HK\$160.00.

Long-time RASHKB member Sir David Akers-Jones new book *Feeling the Stones: Reminiscences by David Akers-Jones* has recently been published by the Hong Kong University Press. In the Foreword, the Rt. Hon Lord Wilson of Tillyorn writes "From his first arrival in Hong Kong in 1957, David Akers-Jones made it his business to understand and get to know the people of Hong Kong, their culture, their history and their ambitions. That deep understanding pervades this excellent, informative and fascinating book". The book is published in two versions, English and Chinese, and is available at a special discounted price for RASHKB members from HKUP (see enclosed leaflet for members who receive this newsletter by mail – Email recipients contact HKUP on 2550 2703 or Email hkupress@hku.hk or go to <http://www.hkupress.org>.)

Parsee cemetery in Canton

As a follow-up to the very successful visit to the Parsee Cemetery at Whampoa a few months ago, and to the recent visit to the Parsee Cemetery and Prayer-Hall in Hong Kong, the Society has been assisting the Parsee Community in Hong Kong in their attempts to get the Parsee Cemetery at Whampoa restored and opened to the public. On March 8th, the President of the Society, Dr. Patrick Hase, accompanied Mr. Jal Shroff, the President of the Parsee Community, and several other Parsee Trustees, on a visit to Canton. The Parsee cemetery and Picnic House at Whampoa were visited. Members will be glad to know that the cemetery has been made a Historical Monument, and given legal protection. A notice-board to this effect has been placed at the foot of the hill on which the cemetery stands. Regular cutting of the undergrowth has rendered the path up the hill much easier to negotiate than in the past! The party also had dinner with the Secretary-General of the Guangzhou Committee of Antiquities and Monuments (M. Chen Yuhuan, who is also the Deputy Director of the Canton Cultural Affairs Bureau), who expressed the eagerness of the Canton authorities to have the cemetery restored. She will ensure that the necessary background research is undertaken, and hopes to have a plan for the restoration finalised soon.

The Society will keep this project in view, and continue to give what assistance it can to this worthwhile project.

RASHKB visit to Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh

14 members made this interesting but somewhat strenuous journey in mid-January 2004, with the aim of attending the annual Torgya festival and propitiation ceremonies at the famed Tawang Gompa in western Arunachal Pradesh (formerly "North East Frontier Agency" or NEFA), India. This is one of the two major annual celebrations at this gompa (the other is held in the autumn).

For the third year in a row, group bookings made with a Bangkok-based airline were annoyingly and unceremoniously dumped at short notice. The main party of nine came to Kolkata early, with an overnight in Dhaka; the second group of five reached in time for a few hours' sleep. All joined a mid-morning flight to Guwahati and met up with the guides and the sturdy bus, which were with us throughout. After a late lunch, we drove along the Brahmaputra to our overnight halt (with cultural show) at Hotel Luit in Tezpur. The next day, after briefly visiting the Tipi Orchid Sanctuary, we had our Restricted Area Permits checked at Bhalukpong Checkpost and proceeded uphill to Bomdila. All along the road from Bhalukpong to Tawang and beyond, it was striking to see innumerable small and larger "In Memoriam" and "In loving memory" plaques to honour both the valour of officers and jawans fallen during the Sino-Indian war of 1962, and the losses incurred by the Border Roads Organisation in building and maintaining the highway over these hills.

After overnighting in Bomdila, we took advantage of an opportunity window in the road-widening blasting to slip through the pass down to Dirang for another overnight (at Hotel Pema Ling, the best hotel during this trip). The following day, a steep switchback climb with cloudy views brought us to a welcome teastop before Sela Pass (13,700 ft), then downhill - with stops to pay our respects at austere and dignified war memorials - to Jang for hot lunch. We reached Tawang town "at the far edge of dusk", and stayed four nights at the venerable Hotel Buddha (the best in town).

It snowed during this first night, and happily thereafter the weather remained fine. As the monks had delayed the start of the ceremonies by a day, we took the chance to travel southwest towards the Bhutan border to make a full-day visit to Zhemithang and pay respects to the famous Gorsam eye-chorten (on the pilgrim's "chorten path") which is being nicely re-furbished under the direction of the Rinpoche of the "Upper Monastery" in Bomdila (which we also visited).

During the further days at Tawang we observed the monk dances and ceremonies (notably the bringing out, blessing, and consignment to the fires of the sacrificial tormas), inspected the prayer hall and adjacent museum, checked out the handicrafts centre, paid our respects at the splendid and dignified Tawang War Memorial, and attended the wang at the gompa. It was interesting to note that the dances and musical accompaniment were more austere (some suggested more authentic to the original tradition) than those in Bhutan, and the enthusiasm of the Monpa at the wang was almost without constraint at times.

Returning through a fine but bitterly cold Sela Pass, the group reached Dirang as light was fading. Many shops in town were closed for a public holiday, but we fortunately made the acquaintance of Dr Mohan Bhattacharya, Director of the National Research Centre on Yak under the ICAR (Indian Council of Agricultural Research). With his staff, he received us nicely, provided coffee, and gave more than an hour of his time to explain the background to his work. It was a pleasure to sign the visitor's book and to ensure that the Society's library would receive future copies of the Centre's Newsletter. Accommodation problems at Dirang were resolved, and on the next morning we variously walked or were driven down to a new gompa, and then took some time to explore the water-driven grain mills of lower Dirang village and its old dzong (sadly in need of repair). We had no time to visit the black-necked crane winter nesting sites.

Then uphill again to Bomdila, re-visiting the Handicraft Centre, and downhill to the Sherdukpen village of Rupa and another fine gompa. Lunch was at the Circuit House, where at least one local lady greeted us with the traditional extended tongue (also seen in Ladakh and parts of Tibet) and terrific smile. It was dark when we reached Bhalukpong, and quite late when we got to Tezpur for a final dinner. We left early the next morning via a "short-cut" to Guwahati airport, which we reached just as our flight was boarding.

Correction

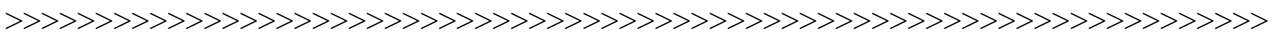
In the February newsletter, on page 5, under *Asian Vernacular Architecture*, a link was given to the series homepage, which seems to have duplicated itself. The correct link is:-

<http://www.newpaltz.edu/~knappr/SH-MMAVA/>

Members may also be interested in Prof. Knapp’s general website, dealing with Chinese and Asian architecture:-

<http://www.newpaltz.edu/~knappr/>

Professor Knapp welcomes manuscripts dealing with vernacular architecture in Hong Kong for the new series of books entitled *Spatial Habitus: Making and Meaning in Asia’s Vernacular Architecture*.



OF INTEREST TO MEMBERS

History of The Helena May

For those of you not familiar with The Helena May, it is the lovely old colonial building gracing Garden Road, almost opposite the American Consulate. Helena, wife of Governor Henry May, was the driving force behind the formation of the Helena May Institute, whose purpose was to provide safe accommodation for single women working in Hong Kong at that time. With charitable donations from Mr. (later Sir) Ellis Kadoorie and Ho Kom Tong, amongst others, and a grant of the site in Garden Road from the Government, the Helena May Institute opened its doors in 1916. In preparation for its 90th anniversary in 2006, current members of the Helena May have formed a History Group, and hope to publish a small book on the history of Helena May and the institute that she founded in 1916. All the records prior to 1946 were destroyed during WWII, and we are searching for information about Helena May, her life before she came to Hong Kong, the founding of the institute and its early days, the ladies who stayed there, their backgrounds and occupations, social functions that were held there, etc. etc. If any RAS members know any ladies who either stayed there, or who lived in Hong Kong in the early years of the institute and may have attended functions there, please could they pass their contact details to Mary Painter, at the RAS email address or telephone 2813 7500. Many thanks.

Friends of Hoi Ha

RAS members David and Nicola Newbery recently helped set up *Friends of Hoi Ha*, an environmental pressure group. RAS members may like to support them in their endeavours to protect Hoi Ha Wan Marine Park, either by joining FOHH or by passing on information about them to interested friends. Keep a look out in the SCMP where they are often quoted on marine park issues. They have appeared before LegCo’s Environmental Panel and are currently working on their third paper for presentation to them. They have recently produced their first newsletter, with photographs showing the stunning beauty of the bay. This and a membership application form can be found on their website: www.friendsofhoiha.net.

Royal Over-Seas League

RAS members are cordially invited to book for the farewell lunchtime talk by the outgoing Canadian Consul-General, Mr. Anthony F. Burger, in which he will review political and economic matters in Hong Kong. This is being organised by the Royal Over-Seas League, at the China Club, 14/F, on July 7th, from 12:15 p.m. Cost HK\$350, including drinks.

ROSL NEXT, the younger members' sub-group of the ROSL, is having an evening gathering at the new residence of the new British Consul-General, on 16th July. Younger readers are welcome to book for that. Send your e/mail address to secretary@rosl.org.hk, asking to be added to ROSL's mailing list for these functions.

Hong Kong Memories: Selected Historical Pictures of the 19th Century

Special Exhibition Gallery (2), 3/F, Hong Kong Museum of Art

The Hong Kong Museum of Art houses a precious collection of historical pictures depicting the scenery and life styles of the people in Hong Kong, Macau, Guangzhou and other trading ports on the China coast. Those valuable works of art were made by artists of both Chinese and Western origins and have now been esteemed as historical as well as aesthetic treasures. A display of about 60 oil paintings, watercolours and prints are selected to illustrate the picturesque scenes in Hong Kong from the opening of the port to the late 19th century. Gone are the modest fishing villages, the colonial architecture and the junks that once filled the Victoria Harbour. It is only through the scenes preserved in these pictures that the past can be reconstructed. Distinctive export goods including silverware, porcelain, lacquer ware and Canton enamel are also displayed in the Gallery. The exhibition opens on 18th June.

Exhibitions at the Hong Kong University Museum and Art Gallery

The Central Business District: historical perspectives

9 June- 30 August 2004

This exhibition is jointly presented by the University Museum and Art Gallery, HKU, and the University's Centre of Urban Planning and Environmental Management (CUPEM).

Featuring mainly historical photographs, this exhibition will show the extraordinary rise of the Central Business District from the 1840s to the present-day. Hong Kong's Central district was established as the centre of administrative and mercantile life in Hong Kong, a function that it continues to perform to this day. As the importance of Hong Kong as an entrepôt grew, so did its population, increasing pressure on Central's most precious resource: land. By tracing the history of Central, this exhibition shows that reclamation, notably the Praya Reclamation Scheme of 1890-1904, was the most effective solution to this problem. It also encouraged the continual re-development of a single plot of land with successive generations of buildings. Central continues to soar, its growth reflecting that of Hong Kong and her people. The exhibition will also include a number of maps, models and historical paintings to elucidate this theme.

The Museum opening hours are Monday to Saturday 9:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.; Sundays 1:30 to 5:30 p.m. The Museum is closed on public holidays. Admission is free. All are welcome.

Please visit the Museum website www.hku.hk/hkumag or call 2241-5512 for further information.

The Hong Kong Gardening Society

A friendly group that shares a love of gardening, whether it is with pots on a balcony, houseplants or a garden. They don't all have 'green thumbs' but they share tips and advice from a monthly newsletter and

coffee mornings and arrange visits to gardens and places of horticultural interest. For information Email membership@gardeninghongkong.com or call 2719 4870 or go to www.gardeninghongkong.com.

Publications Order Form

I am a member of the Royal Asiatic Society, Hong Kong Branch

I would like to order copies of **In the Heart of the Metropolis: Yaumatei and Its People** at the special members' price of HK\$275.00 plus HK\$40.00 postage per volume.

I would like to order copies of **Beyond the Metropolis: Villages in Hong Kong** at the special members' price of HK\$320.00 plus HK\$40.00 postage per volume.

I would like to order **two-volume sets** of the above books at HK\$575.00 plus HK\$70.00 postage.

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